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GOLDEN BIRD

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DOROTHY EASTON



TATTERDEMALION

By

JOHN GALSWORTHY

Crown 8vo. 7/6 net.

"Mr. Galsworthy is not afraid to be pitiful, to be an idealist, to be a worshipper of beauty as no mere distraction from ugly truth, but a great spiritual power for the enlargement of life and love. . . . The book as a whole is clear revelation of one of the best and bravest minds of our time."—*The Times*.

LONDON : WILLIAM HEINEMANN

THE GOLDEN BIRD

AND OTHER SKETCHES

BY

DOROTHY EASTON
"

WITH A FOREWORD BY

JOHN GALSWORTHY



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FOREWORD

By JOHN GALSWORTHY

THE sketch is, I take it, commonly supposed to be the easiest form that a writer can use, and the bad sketch probably is. The good sketch, on the other hand, is about the hardest, for there is no time in which to go wrong, or, rather, in which to recover if one does go wrong. Moreover, it demands a very faithful objectivity and a rare sensitiveness of touch. The good sketcher does not bite off more than he or she can chew, does not waste a word, and renders into writing that alone which is significant. To catch the flying values of life and convey them to other minds and hearts in a few pages of picture may seem easy to the lay reader, but is, I do assure him, mortal hard.

The sketches in this, the first book of a young writer, are so really good that they should require no preliminary puff. But the fact is that the reading public in America and England get so few good sketches, indeed so few volumes of sketches at all, that even the best work of this kind has unfairly little chance.

If I know anything, and I am not alone in my opinion, the writer of this book has a sympathetic apprehension of life, and a perfection in rendering

FOREWORD

it which is altogether out of the common. Those readers who want not snapshots but little pictures, entirely without preciousness, extraordinarily sensitive and faithful, and never dull, because they have real meaning and truth, will appreciate this volume.

Those who don't know the southern countryside of England, and the simpler people thereof, will make a real acquaintanceship with it through some of these unpretentious pages. And the French sketches, especially, by their true flavour of French life, guarantee the writer's possession of that spiritual insight without which art is nothing worth.

I will beat the drum no more ; for if the reader likes not this mental fare, no noise of mine will make him.

I

THE GOLDEN BIRD

I

THIS little garden of Mrs. Nightingale's is a sweet place to walk in, lying, as it does, in the heart of the village.

A cluster of orchards sloping down to dark woods ; elm trees, yellow beeches, a chimney covered with scarlet creepers. There are old-fashioned "button flowers," mahogany-coloured, with dew on their grey leaves ; sage and thyme grow by the pear tree. The foxhound pup runs in, a jolly dog with loving eyes ; he comes and eats all the twigs off the raspberry canes.

Winds blow, a shower of yellow leaves sweeps over . . . I can see "The Golden Bird."

An old inn, with mossy roof, and for its sign a strange bird flying at the sun. Painted by some broken artist when he had no money to pay for his bed—was he drunk when he drew it ?

Mrs. Nightingale comes out with a cup of rhubarb wine :

" You lookin' at 'The Golden Bird' ? " she says. " See that winder under it ? That's where young Swaine 'as lain ten years. 'Tis some sort o' rheumatism climbin' up his back—from sleepin' in

THE GOLDEN BIRD

a damp bed when 'e was footman. . . . There's a glass by 'is bed, so's 'e can see the village road, an' a string by 'is 'and, so's 'e can wave a flag to greet ye ; 'twas the postman run it up for 'im. Like to come an' see 'im ? 'E's lonesome. My darter'll take you down at five o'clock."

A little fresh talking sound runs through the trees, cocks are crowing, and all the brown chrysanthemums nodding their heads. A drift of leaves have blown across the windows of "The Golden Bird" . . .

. . . Twilight. I have just come from seeing Dick Swaine. His mother, a burly old woman in a blue dress, opened the door ; the inn is dark. But while we stood there came a sound of music.

We climbed a steep, black staircase. Inside that room I saw a young man lying, with a white face turned to us through the shadows. The corners were dark already, but with his mirror he showed me the last gleam of sunset. His sister came in, a tall, fair girl, then I noticed the room was full of flowers. She shut the door, and, the young man still smiling, we were shown a church he had built of matches, a shawl he had knitted, and many boxes quaintly carved ; hours and hours of time in the making of each "fancy."

Down below a man spat on the mud. "Play to us," said the sister. He drew a violin from under the sheets.

He couldn't bend his cheek to it, but held it on his chest ; the room was quite dark now ; we sat without stirring, and the sister sang . . .

Very low, so that her voice and the soft strings

mingled, then rising as the passion of the music rose. It seemed the roof lifted, the walls of the little room vanished . . .

Mrs. Swaine's tread reached us, coming with the lamp.

A dark night, new moon. They have been cutting creepers—I have just run back with a bunch of crimson leaves and left them at "The Golden Bird."

II

. . . There is still a thread of scarlet on the old chimney, a tinge of orange on the elms. Clouds travel fast to-day, the road is thick with leaves.

I often go to "The Golden Bird" at twilight to tell Dick how the woods are thinning; how the beeches have turned dark purple, and the ash trees feathery gold, and the ground under them flamed.

Dick seems to look through the walls of his room: "The sycamores 'ud be turned now," he'll say, or "'Tis the undergrowths perishin'."

I tell him how it was clear this morning, and frosty, a milk-white breath on the hills; how the woods were quiet as a dream, each tree naked against the cobweb of lights. "A leaf blew in my window," he says, smiling. I tell him of the old shepherd I met, with a high peaked hat and a huge umbrella on his back for a tent . . . (the sound of sheep bells comes to us). And how at three o'clock the sun slipped over the Downs, and all the country turned misty-blue like wild forget-me-nots; how pale clouds coloured up and suddenly took fire;

and, as the last red light died out, how the rooks darkened the whole country with their flighting.

"Twilight falls sudden," says Dick. His face is very pale these autumn nights.

" . . . That wood where the rooks go is full of violets in the spring," he tells me. "Flowers! . . . I love them white narcissus . . ." In the silence comes the clang of iron being hammered. It is nearly dark, a scent of dying leaves drifts in.

And then, talking of life, and food, and poor men's wages, we watch the sparks fly from the forge below—red stars thrown up against the purple trees, blazing, vanishing. ". . . Sets you thinkin'," whispers Dick. "We're all sparks from the same old forge, but some flies redder than others. . . . 'Tis roast pheasant this evenin' at the Hall."

"And you'd like some?"

"No, no. I'm not blamin' the aristocracy; they means well. Our lady's a mortal kind woman! Sent me a bunch of grapes last summer—and mostly they don't send you grapes till you're dyin'. No, no, 'tisn't that . . ."

Some thought too big for his utterance shadows Dick's face. ". . . 'Tis the *feelin'*," he falters, and then with a sigh, "Ah, well, they don't know better . . ."

A gust of wind, laden with leaves from all the trees, flies past, and over the top of the woods appears the new moon.

"The boys an' girls is comin' in this evenin'. Would you care for to come, miss?"

So last night I went in again at seven o'clock.

Lamplight, a room full of laughing faces, smoke

and music. Dick had his violin, and "Charlie," the blacksmith, was singing the "Old Hundredth"—a huge man, with soft eyes and a glorious voice.

There was "Jim," gardener at the Vicarage, and a good-looking youth, second footman from the Hall, with four or five of the women-servants; one splendid girl—such a figure!—and a "don't-touch-me" air, that was given the lie direct by her laughing lips.

The little kitchen-maids nearly died of giggling; the head parlourmaid laughed, too, but soundlessly. They all laughed . . . and the village girls laughed to see them laugh.

A girl opposite me—"Slap-cabbage" they called her—had eyes like two black devils. It was hard to picture her in a decorous cap and apron, her dark hair flew out, her face burnt red. When she stood up to sing, she leapt. And when she sang, she shouted.

I was never conscious of the second footman—he had so learnt the art of oblivion, but the gardener's long legs were all over the room.

A pale light shone on Dick's face, our choruses shook the bed: "Who will o'er the Downs with Me?" "Sweet Chiming Bells." Charlie gave us "Uncle Tom Cobbler," and "The Old Armchair."

Dick's eyes were soft as honey, for the lads won't come without a gift, if it's but a pipeful of tobacco, and the girls bring flowers, the first violet, the last rose, a daisy!

The room grew warm with our laughter, our faces looked as if we had sat round a bonfire; only one chill moment, when the head parlourmaid asked

the time. Then "Slap-cabbage" told us she was leaving *her* place because she couldn't get her voice soft enough to suit. And suddenly mounting her chair she gave a great shout that nearly had the roof off. Dick struck up a jig, and it seemed as if the tall girl with the laughing lips must burst out of her dress. They sat very stiffly, these maids from the Hall, their bodies drilled, like straight bottles full of some heady wine that was gathering force with waiting.

A shiver of ecstasy ran round when Dick's sister, accompanied by the violin, sang one of her songs. The gardener kept stroking his leg and Charlie pulling his long moustache, the footman put down his cigarette, and I heard the parlourmaid's corsets creak; she had drawn too deep a breath.

We were all singing "Auld Lang Syne" when Mrs. Swaine climbed up, her face like a crumpled apple. "There, now!" she cried, "the music of ye's waked the fowls up!" and set down a tray of green gooseberry wine, a liquor that makes one's cheeks very pink and one's toes tingle!

Then, standing round with joined hands, we shouted "Rule, Britannia," and "God save the King."

It was dark coming out; I should have stumbled but that the blacksmith gave me his arm; cottage gates are hard to see.

II

“ IMPOSSIBLE ”

THE advertisement ran : “Lady wishes to share comfortable home, do light house work, be companionable : mutual terms——” My aunt having replied to it received a letter written in a dashing hand, signed “Lottie Boyle”; Mrs. Boyle had a passion for gardening, it seemed, and for cleaning silver, but she couldn’t give us an interview, she would come on trial for a week instead, and would be wearing a navy-blue felt hat trimmed with “coque” feathers . . .

Our vicar’s wife, seeing the letter, laid it down at that point :

“ ‘Coque’ feathers ? ” she asked, looking up over her spectacles—she herself always wears a little sealskin cap like a cough lozenge, set tight on smooth plaits, above honest eyes the colour of the Alpine gentian—but my aunt’s heart was touched ; “Poor thing ! ” she murmured.

It was snowing on the day fixed for the companion to arrive, and the third-class carriages on our line are cold, dirty, and very draughty ; I thought of Mrs. Boyle sitting shivering while the train rushed her down to a house of strangers ; now and then a spot of rain would hit the glass, while the wind howled ; she would arrive in a

county covered with snow, and then—the station cab !

I was at the door when Mrs. Boyle arrived, and saw a smartly dressed lady get out.

“What’s the fare ? ” she asked intensely. She was nervous, pulled between two great issues, the meeting with my aunt and the risk of paying six-pence too much for the cab, and money is so vital when you haven’t got it, the sixpence outweighed my aunt. Then, having reached the drawing-room door, Mrs. Boyle took aim and charged.

But there was a tea-table in her way, she had to lean right over it so that her huge hat covered my aunt like an umbrella ; I saw her yellow earrings flapping and the great green “coque” feather ; her hands were shaking, her words came with a rush.

“How are you, my dear ? What a sweet place you’ve got ! I’m a little deaf to-day, you mustn’t mind . . . when we get used to each other ! . . .”

“Take Mrs. Boyle up to wash her hands before tea,” came my aunt’s voice eventually ; Mrs. Boyle’s exit was followed by one of those painful silences that no one cares to be the first to break.

She soon came back, poor thing, she was afraid to leave us !

She had to “get her foot in ” first. And she sat like some one posing to be photographed ; she sat and smiled. They say martyrs at the stake died smiling, but their fate was sealed ; uncertainty is so much more horrible ; to sit and eat hot scones

that open up a land of promise—while your heart beats in your throat . . . I saw that heavy pulse, I heard her stays creak.

When my aunt spoke Mrs. Boyle smiled and nodded—all that little pitiful play-acting the deaf keep up to pretend they are in the current of life ; but when I shouted a word she really heard her eyes nearly fell out of her head with gratitude. I got a fantastic feeling that her big nose and mouth stuck out like ears, that the very nerves of her face were listening.

“Ah ! You don’t know me. You don’t know ! Wait ! When I’ve been here a week you’ll never want to part with me ! I’m a good worker . . . I can do anything ! . . .”

She came down to supper presently in a gorgeous frock made for some one slim, her black and grey streaked hair was piled up “in the style of the Royal Family ”; with passionate care she had stuck in a tortoise-shell comb, fastened a heavy silver collar round her neck, changed her earrings, rouged her forehead and neck to give an “outdoor ” look.

My aunt is a dainty housekeeper, our table elated Mrs. Boyle and set her talking ; compliments first, everything in the room from the carpet to the Chippendale sideboard, from the silver to the flowers, and through it all, like a weasel, burrowing, attempts to get at *my* thoughts. But there’s a certain privacy we won’t see ravaged without fighting, there are certain people who fatally force the fight.

Mrs. Boyle, eating our mince pies, began to speak of herself, she was the wife of “Benjy Boyle,” the

poet ; we'd heard of Benjy ? Such a sweet writer, his language—so refined ! She told us an anecdote just to show us how refined his language was.

“ Why, one day I went to the cemetery to do up his mother's grave—I'm very clever, you know, in little ways, I didn't spend anything, as I told him—I sneaked a bit of ivy off one old grave and a fern off another—‘ You *what?* ’ he says ; he rose off his chair. ‘ You *sneaked?* ’ Why couldn't you say you “ took it ” ? . . . And if I say I saw Mrs. Jigger's kid he'd say ‘ Does she keep goats ? ’ —That's the sort he is . . . refined ! ”

“ You don't live together ? ”

“ No, dear, not for a long time now—a wicked woman came between us. Are you in love ? ”

(This last anxiously to me.)

She was talking to us about Buckingham Palace when my aunt suggested cards—I saw her eyes like the eyes of a rabbit in a strangulation trap : it was “ some years ” since she had played (I think her mouth went dry). “ Oh, yes, she'd play ! ” My aunt is so fond of cards that a good player would be pardoned much ; she sat now in expectant silence like a judge. Mrs. Boyle looked terrified. She played for an hour a game she had never heard of, while that pulse beat in her throat and sudden, short, full sighs burst up to her lips and were smothered there.

I can see her now—with her head bent over sideways, as if kissing the cards, trying desperately to hear. Trying desperately to please. And smiling . . . a smile that made her look like a tortured monkey.

My aunt had an attack of asthma when we went to bed. “That woman!” she whispered, and I had to write the note asking Mrs. Boyle to go, but I felt like a man who seals a death warrant.

When the maid took the letter to her next morning Mrs. Boyle rushed straight out of bed and flung herself on my aunt. She kissed our hands—there was something awful in such tenacity; my aunt was frightened, and I noticed a strange, spirituous breath coming from Mrs. Boyle that frightened *me*. We were about the same height, when we faced each other our eyes were level; hers—yellow and green—seemed set on wires that her heart jerked, they flew about my face from side to side, I couldn’t hold them; but her hands clutched my arms, she laid herself on my chest like a slug, and smiled . . . an awful smile. I saw that the skin of her face was spotty, like a toad’s.

“You must go,” I shouted (she couldn’t, wouldn’t hear).

“Save me!” she implored. “I’ve nothing! Nowhere to go! Oh! oh! . . . It’ll be the end! . . .”

I was terrified for my aunt, and felt pity buckle up into a hardness I had never dreamt of; the poor woman was pressing her rubbery lips on mine: I heard my aunt coughing, my legs were trembling, my face flushed red.

“Think of *him*!” she shrieked; “for *his* sake pity me!”

We kept her for a couple of days while she got an answer from somebody at Brighton; my aunt stayed in bed and Mrs. Boyle and I dined *tête-à-tête*,

painful meals, a sense of violence in the air still, invisible blows that her raddled face bore smiling.

It was thawing when she left, and the road had turned to yellow slush, light rain was falling ; Mrs. Boyle looked at me on the doorstep with her fugitive, furtive eyes, a cowering look . . . “ The thin end of the wedge,” my reason told me, and I shut the door. Half an hour later the motor-bus started for Brighton ; I was on the beach when it passed ; I saw Mrs. Boyle in the back seat, a comic look on her face as though inviting all the world to come and dance. There’s a little gin-shop near the bus stand.

In what mood, I wondered, would she arrive at Brighton ?

Each refusal would make effort harder—more trouble—more drink !

And at the end ? “ Impossible ! ”

III

LAUGHING DOWN

THAT sweet hour before sunset, when a glow creeps into clouds, wild violet coloured over fields of yellow mustard. Somewhere under the haze there is a village folded among trees.

“ Maybe you’ll find it,” says the shepherd, “ an’ maybe you’ll pass an’ never see it.” So I leave the fields for the downs.

Pale, apricot-coloured grass to the top of my boots, the west rosy, the east deepening to hyacinth blue ; twilight falls swiftly—a breath of wrack from the sea, sudden dew in the valley.

With the first quickened step daylight takes to itself wings. Until this moment I had been singing ; over the ridge appears an empty valley, only a marsh of vapour, not a tree, not a light. Have I passed the village ? Which way shall I go ? . . . The beginning of an odd feeling of desolation is the only answer. It doesn’t matter which way !

The glow has faded, hills and sky fused in one dim cloud ; in the silence, the gathering darkness, the tramping of my feet shakes the stars out.

A “ dew pond ” appears close by, and suddenly a dog barks ! An old cowshed down in a wet, black yard ; the ghostly form of a tree ; the dog dragging at his chain ; then a voice, and a big, savage, labouring man looks out.

"Laughing Down. Sit you, now, and rest you," says the man's wife, a fine, dishevelled woman with dirty hands, red cheeks, and glorious limbs. She keeps wiping these hands on a tattered apron ; the lower part of her figure is free as a man's, and her breast is full and free ; her eyes are clear, her dull hair looks as if field mice had nibbled it.

A strange place, this hovel, rough flint walls like the cowshed, no ceiling, only a low roof slanting almost to the ground. No window, a big barn-yard door fastened by a chain, with a glimpse of stars through the crevice. The mud floor is all caked in hollows where the cowherd has stamped his feet. Pickaxe and spade lean together by the concertina ; there are pictures, "Cherry Ripe," "Pears' Soap," and a calendar ten years old.

The man, standing with his back to the fire, looks black as a negro. What muscles he has !

All this time some muffled sound has been trying to penetrate my drowsy senses ; it seems nearer than the bullocks, louder than the wind—there, in the darkest corner, are two huge beds ! Mountains of rags ! And like apples thrown about, at top and bottom, anywhere—children's faces ! whispering, laughing together. One little girl, like a wild strawberry, and eyes all mischief, dark hair cropped short, and a finger pointing at the stranger.

"That's Mary 'Liz'beth," says the mother, "and this one's 'Arriet 'Ilda, that's Rose Jemima in the next bed, an' Berty, an' Bobbie, an' Martha Jane. My 'usband's name is Bravery."

She picks up a splendid fat baby and begins to suckle it. Seating myself on the patchwork bed,

the child with merry eyes begins to smile at me ; it is like holding a wild rabbit, or a bird—that furtive stillness. She was born on Laughing Down.

“ ’Tis a bit rough an’ out o’ repare,” says the man. “ Th’ hovel was empty a long time. The family what lived ’ere afore us got turned out ; the children was older—an’ carried on wrong——”

The dog whines suddenly, the child snuggles her hot face to my breast. Is there a bogey-man on Laughing Down ? Mr. Bravery gets an old lantern to light me to the village and wipes off the cobwebs with his hand ; his wife searches among torn clothes for a candle end, red firelight shining on her string of copper beads.

Fifteen shillings a week wages, six children, coal a big price and difficult to get up there ; no wood, for the copse below is preserved for pheasant shooting ; no milk ; no chimney, so their fire smokes all the winter. They are two miles from the village school, the children’s boots look like old paper.

But there is no grizzling, they accept life Ashamed of the hovel, yet thankful for it. “ It’s not a proper place——” Mr. Bravery’s constant remark. “ But what are you to do—when cottages is ’ard to come by an’ rents so dear ? ”

Mr. Bravery was handicapped, it seems, by having his old mother “ on him ” as a young man. She didn’t want to go to the Union, so he kept her—(with sudden apology) : “ Beggin’ your pardon, miss.” He stops.

At parting, Mrs. Bravery pulls out their former rent books. “ But we ’ave paid,” she says. “ We’re *respectable*.”

IV

FROG'S HOLE

AN hour after sunset, when the lanes were dark, the door of "The Devil's Head" Inn opened and a man and woman came out. They walked in silhouette against a shaft of orange light that caught the tips of the man's big ears, and when he looked round flared on his red face, red hair, the red rims of his little blue eyes, and on his wife's hat tilted backwards over her huge, stout figure.

"Come on," croaked the man, then the door of "The Devil's Head" banged shut and it was dark again.

"G'arge—where are ye ? "

"'Ere, aren't ye never goin' to get 'ome to-night ? "

"Give me time, G'arge, I—"

There came a sound of spitting and swearing ; George Weekes had stubbed his toe.

"I can't," gasped his wife. "I must sit down."

"They'll be out d'rectly an think yer drunk ! Come in 'ere." He opened a gate and the clatter of their boots on the road ceased, they had stepped into Frog's Hole Meadow. Weekes led on till he came to a walnut tree, then sat down carefully ; his wife tumbled after him, rolling on the grass, fanning her big face that she said felt ready "to burst with heat."

Frog's Hole sloped down to a pond ; trees on a bank of grass topped the meadow, the soil itself was covered with "kilk," a yellow weed like mustard. No dew fell that night, but long, low drifts of mist came up, and were swept away like water on a soundless wind ; a small, pale moon swam in it ; in her faint light the flowers looked like some ghostly body-cloth she had dropped.

"Black Beauty"—that was what they called Mrs. Weekes—sat and groaned in it, her face shone like a dark plum, the blood thumped in her throat, and when she turned her cheek the silver light on it only made it seem more hot and ripe.

For it's one thing to hoe turnips, another to carry them. Weekes and his wife had carried four big baskets to the village five miles away, up and down hill, with the sun blistering their necks. They had done their shopping and got their groceries nearly home—past "The Devil's Head," where they had stopped for a glass. They were not drunk, only deadly tired and "fuddled."

"G'arge," Mrs. Weekes was whispering, "get me a little water from the pond, just me hand-kercher in water—Oh, Lord ! oh, Lord !——"

"Where's me baccy ?" asked Mr. Weekes hoarsely.

"Basket——" gasped his wife. George Weekes began turning over the groceries, stopping every few minutes to stare at the moon, as if he couldn't for the life of him think what it was.

A baby toad hopped on the white chalk below the kilk.

"G'arge !——"

" 'Ere, th' blasted baccy ? "

" Just a drop—"

" I gave you the packet, where d'ye put it ? "

" I don' know—I don' know—"

" Lord, save a man ! *Which* basket ? "

" I don' know—" There was a sound of stones rolling. Mr. Weekes lifted his hairy hand, the moonlight caught him in the whites of his eyes, the blow fell aimlessly past the brim of his wife's hat.

George Weekes felt all at once disgusted with women, silly things that cried if you raised your hand and couldn't remember a man's tobacco.

" I'm goin' 'ome," he said ; " you can foller."

He got up, staggering (his legs had gone to sleep), and passing the walnut tree from the roadside heard a faint rustling—as it might be his wife getting up ; he called her a drunken name and dragged on down the lane. It took all his strength to reach the cottage ; having got there, he left the door open so that she shouldn't come in " nagging " at him, climbed painfully upstairs, dropped his clothes off, and fell into their huge feather bed.

* * * * *

He had been asleep one minute, it seemed, when daylight woke him. He kicked out a leg to wake his wife ; it struck cold sheets, and he opened his eyes rather quickly. The first moment before memory has quite come back is a queer one. Then Mr. Weekes sat up and looked round ; the other half of the bed had not been slept in.

He didn't hurry his dressing. " She's slep' downstairs," he told himself, but he felt a weight

on his stomach. Downstairs the house was empty, the door still open.

"Some damn trick to make me——" Mr. Weekes went out of the gate and back along the lane ; last night's happenings were still rather misty, incidents came back to him as one recalls figures from a dream, but without coherence ; and his eyes kept riveting themselves upon sticks and stones, strings of orange creepers, a butterfly. Three walnut leaves, spotted black and gold, danced past his face ; he hurried. Glorious sun on the kilk, drawing out its sweetish scent. Weekes ran along the bank ; he could see his wife's black shawl. She was there all right, under the walnut tree, with her knees drawn up ; he felt he was going to "give her such a slating as he'd never——"

Then he saw she was dead.

The sight of flies buzzing round her roused him again ; he went through the gate. Down the lane he met the farmer, a huge man with a face like a winter sunset, and little dark brown eyes that had a frosty snap, merry and kind, that made one think of holly ; his black hair was soaked with sweat.

"You're late !" he shouted.

"Me wife's dead."

"Eh ?"

"At Frog's Hole——"

The farmer stopped him : "Did your wife die in my field ?"

"You can go an' see."

Mr. Betts, the farmer, was a man of action ; he clamped his hand on the labourer's shoulder and turned him back towards Frog's Hole.

"How d'it happen?"

Weekes answered gruffly: "She's 'ad a fit——"

Workmen on their way to the farm were stopped and told to get hurdles. "What's up?" asked one, and another answered in a hoarse, excited whisper: "Dead, at Frog's Hole!"

George Weekes felt the farmer's hand hot and heavy on him, heard him talking about an inquest, and thought: "It's *my* wife—they oughter let 'er be." So the little group went down the lane towards Frog's Hole.

"Th' Weekes was at 'Th' Devil's 'Ead' las' night," said some one. "Send for Mr. Jewks," snapped the farmer.

"She wasn't drunk," said Weekes.

The publican, an old man like a grey parrot, joined them at the gate.

"Where?" asked the farmer—he felt Weekes flagging and hanging back.

"By the tree," whispered the wretched husband, and at the thought of seeing her again his red hair stood up in little spikes, while the farmer, like some huge machine, forced him down the field.

A dozen leaves had fallen on her shawl; they intensified her stillness; one on her lips twisted him so queerly that he felt sick. Mr. Betts was questioning him, and the publican's high voice, and men's whispers. "I don't know," he answered stupidly to everything. His own mind was bent back groping for one detail in the mist of last night's memories, one thing that was, he felt, the pivot of it all——

"Was there a row?" they asked; "there's groceries spilt." "She's been dead ten hours." "Did you hit her?"

Weekes was silent, scowling, and at that moment there came the sharp sound of a bicycle passing and a whiff of some keen scent.

"Tobaccer!" cried Weekes, suddenly hot with excitement. "It was my tobaccer! I couldn't find it, an' she says 'twas in the basket, an' I asks *which* basket. An' she kep' on—an' I says 'Lord, save a man!' I says, an' raised me 'and—'"

His moonlit vision of the tobacco hunt dried up, he found himself staring at the village policeman. Mr. Betts was pointing at him, the policeman saying "Come on!" And with a spurt of cold sweat down his spine, comprehension dawned.

He saw it in all their eyes, saw what his silence had done, his muddled speech, and felt faint; with horrible vividness he saw her swelled, blackened face under all that yellow blossom, her stillness; and found himself breathing full sweet scent like honey and melons; and over all a burning autumn sky deep blue as hyacinths.

He felt his skin rise in little lumps at the policeman's touch; all he could gasp was some jumble about "tobaccer." Fear lunged about his mind as you may see an old gate bang in the wind, fear and fury because he couldn't make it plain—he had the whole picture clear before him now. "I only raised me 'and!'" he shouted, and some one laughed. The smell of the kilk choked him, the sky cut him, the policeman gripped his arm and marched him

to the gate. His little blue eyes leapt from the field to the sky, from the sky to the flowers, and back to his wife's face . . . "I didn't——!"

"Now, now," advised the farmer kindly. "Lyin' won't help yer! *Tell the truth!*"

V

FOR THE RED CROSS

MRS. BOSANQUET is one of those bright, pleasant little women who bring the breath of success into whatever they do ; so when a local auction sale for the Red Cross was thought of, the committee begged her to go round and " beat the drum," in other words, to invigorate those who were likely to buy and to flatter those who had things to sell.

Mrs. Bosanquet called upon the Ellershawes. " With all your lovely china," she said, throwing her whole soul into the word " lovely," " you must have some little dish or tea service you would be proud to give. If the county knew that some of Mrs. Ellershawes's china was being sold for the Red Cross they'd come for the sake of seeing it."

She got a Rockingham dessert service eventually (with one cracked dish), but it featured well in the catalogue.

This gay, persuasive patriot went to Mrs. Byngley. The old lady was sitting in lonely state in front of a Japanese silk fire-screen, under a painted ceiling, surrounded by pale walls from which gold candlesticks branched out like gilded antlers.

" We want to make our sale a great success," confided Mrs. Bosanquet, " much better than the one they had at Blenham. . . . Now, if you could help us . . . "

"Eh?"

"No one has anything like *your* collection . . ."

Mrs. Byngley's face was moved by a dim smile; "yes, she had been somebody in her day, she was glad they knew it; she had to live poorly now—but still . . . for the Red Cross?" She sent an enormous book of fine engravings with a note to say that her husband had bought it forty years ago for thirty guineas, it was probably worth fifty now; and she sent as well an antique table of some fine yellow wood, inlaid and covered with glass.

Mrs. Bosanquet had harder work at the Vicarage; they had so much they were glad to give, and that had come in the first place from jumble sales; feather fans, and hideous vases, a stuffed owl on a bunch of "tottie" grass, a camera that wouldn't work, and a colossal meerschaum pipe.

". . . But some of your own exquisite embroidery," she said to the vicar's wife.

She came to Miss Howell's. Miss Howell lives alone in a small house that she can just afford, and by doing her own gardening and keeping out of society she makes both ends meet. She has several nephews and a brother fighting, and, like all lonely people, takes the great war very much to heart. No one knows how many stockings she knitted; but her weather-reddened face suggests a raw nerve of feeling, her grey hair is wind-tossed, her brown eyes speak devotion.

Mrs. Bosanquet sat in her neat little drawing-room and looked all round it for a single thing of value, but the furniture was modern, an imitation William Morris pattern, and the pictures were

mostly family photographs, the china was for use, there were no carved cabinets of curios.

Perhaps Mrs. Bosanquet hardened her heart ; she had just come away from a very bright, beaming interview—which had only resulted in two Spanish wine-glasses ; her reputation was at stake, she must get something better here.

“What have they got besides household things ?” questioned her hostess ; she, too, searching her heart for something worthy.

“Oh, they’ve got a donkey, and a lot of pigs, and a prize bull——”

At the same moment both ladies were aware of Miss Howell’s pug dog.

“Mimi.” The pug was asleep by the fire with her curly black nose on her mistress’s toe, and as if disturbed by the silence she opened two dark eyes that met Miss Howell’s with complete devotion. Guardian stars might shine like that ; the look was accompanied with a little sniff.

“Mimi’s awfully valuable, isn’t she ?” hazarded Mrs. Bosanquet.

“She’s a pedigree pug dog.”

“I suppose you wouldn’t——”

Mrs. Bosanquet didn’t say it archly, she said it anxiously ; this wasn’t a rich gentleman with a cupboard full of china, it was a spinster with one thing in the world she loved, and Mrs. Bosanquet, with the true instinct that made her invaluable, put all the world into her face and voice ; a pretty, well-dressed woman leaning forward with flushed cheeks and shining eyes—as if the destiny of the country hung upon the answer.

Miss Howell's heart responded.

"Do they want dogs?" But it was a mere side issue.

"A dog like *yours*!" came her visitor's breathless whisper.

Miss Howell's face looked hard, hard and bitter; all her life she had had to give up what she loved. Her eyes were stirred by something passionate, heroic; she wouldn't think of Mimi, it was the "cause" that mattered, it was duty . . . Enthusiasm uplifted her; Mimi, at that moment, was the greatest treasure on the earth, and it was in her power to give it.

"You shall have my dog to sell," she said; "it's all I've got—of value."

Mimi sighed and licked her velvet lips with a little motion of contentment, and Miss Howell stooped to stroke her, to hide her face.

"When's the sale?" she asked.

Mrs. Bosanquet told her and hurried away.

That evening when Miss Howell sat brooding, Mimi breathed on her; it was the pug dog's way to sense her mistress's abstractions and to recall her by meeting her eye, and after such triumph to jump on her lap and lie there—a little, pale body, with a wicked, velvet face all creased with delight; then Miss Howell's lips softened; it is sweet to be loved.

Moreover, Mimi's pedigree made her a possession, as well as a companion; she was cared for, guarded, and brought up quite exclusively.

One day a man called: "For a dog, I believe?"

"Yes," said Miss Howell. There was a sound

of a helpless yelp, Mimi appeared in a wicker cage and was lifted into the cart. "Good-bye!" whispered Miss Howell; to the man she said anxiously: "Find Mrs. Bosanquet herself, and only give the dog to her, she'll look after—"

"Yap! Yap!—"

The cart rolled away.

Miss Howell couldn't go to the sale, see strangers staring at her little dog, and at herself, perhaps; see a rough auctioneer who didn't know, and some fat Jew who didn't care, or some silly girl, some hateful person bidding above all the others and thenceforward owning Mimi. No, she walked on the sands till tea-time, feeling nervous and anxious, only staying herself upon the hope of the real good she had done.

Meantime Mrs. Bosanquet, in a little hat made of pheasant's feathers, and a charming velvet coat, and a pair of earrings dangling most bewitchingly from her pretty ears, had driven to the sale room (a large, covered-in cattle market), and was tripping about full of real importance.

Sir Jeremy Vixen was shaking hands with her, and Lady Vixen inviting her to join them at tea; little girls were clustering round, selling flags, and ladies dressed as "Puritans" were selling roses at a shilling each; Mrs. Bosanquet looked more bewitching when she had bought one.

The room was hung with flags and set with side stalls decked with flowers—sweet peas and irises. The crowd trod on sawdust, while they stared at every odd and ancient thing that ever came to light from the recesses of a cupboard.

"Oh, do look at that, ma!" "I say, look at that!"

Sometimes it was a terrible pea-green lamp with a pink shade, sometimes a picture, shiny varnished huntsmen in scarlet coats, or a painted fire-screen of yellow sunflowers. And there were cups of tea, and "home-made" cakes at exorbitant prices, pots of primulas cheek by jowl with tins of salted salmon.

The Rockingham china was half-way down the room near a broken accordion and a pile of mouldy hats. Sir Jeremy Vixen and the auctioneer had their stand at the top, between the "hoop-la" group by the fruit tree section and the "prize pig—guess his weight" competition.

Mrs. Bosanquet was among the lucky ones who got a chair; she had worked so hard she *must* sit down, she felt quite dizzy with it all. Sir Jeremy's speech lasted ten minutes, and the selling of the first thing, an emerald ring, two hours; each rich man who bought it gave it to be sold again, so the sale appeared unending. Then there were tickets for a raffle at the end.

"Ten more tickets, ladies and gentlemen, ten more tickets, chance of your lifetime—lucky number! Don't be shy, now! Shilling each!—going-going-gone!" A breathless scramble while all the crowd tried to see Sir Jeremy do the "drawing," women climbed on the iron rails, and stood on towel horses and chairs for sale; one big boy climbed on the yellow inlaid table and smashed the glass.

Sir Jeremy's red, laughing face was pleased, he

had done well ; he rolled his sleeve back to show there was no "hanky-panky," and spread his hand over the sheet two men were holding ; across the sudden silence one shrill sound was heard, the heartsick screaming of a little dog.

The baronet's fingers closed on a pink ticket : "4961," he read aloud : "Mr. Juppe, of Southsea, has won the emerald ring—"

Then there was a buzz of talk and laughter, and renewed pushing for cups of tea. Mrs. Bosanquet had to hurry to the committee's tent to superintend the half-crown luncheons. It was raining outside ; the cattle-yard was ankle deep in mud, no one wanted to loiter there ; besides, the few animals tied up made such a noise.

There were two or three calves in wooden pens, one so stupefied that it kept slipping and falling on its knees. The sheep were panting and the pigs quivered. A big farm dog nearly throttled itself leaping at its chain, it never ceased barking ; and in a corner by herself was tied a tiny, pearl-pale pug dog.

The live stock outside was left to the last. Meanwhile the air in the iron-roofed market grew hotter and hotter, and the crowd yawned, and the auctioneer grew hoarse. Sir Jeremy had done his part and joined the other "big-wigs" in the tent ; he was very pleased with what they had got—a specimen azalea had fetched twenty pounds, and a melon from his own place had been raffled for fifteen. Two quite modern dish-covers had gone up like old Sheffield, and a rich farmer had paid fifty pounds for a bit of Venetian glass.

Of course, at the end a few people would pick up bargains, you couldn't help that—

Mrs. Bosanquet's conscience pricked her ; she ought to ask a few questions, the people she had been to would want to know.

"Book of engravings ? Oh, yes, half a crown—a schoolboy bought it—"

"And a pedigree pug dog ? "

"There's a man going off with it now—"

A swarthy, thick-necked dealer passed, dragging a dog by a chain.

"How much ? "

"The pug ? One-and-sixpence."

Mrs. Bosanquet realised with a little rush of "nerves" that she was tired out, her rose was dead ; next day she would have to call upon her friends and tell them . . .

"Ah !" Sir Jeremy was offering her a half-crown peach !

VI

THE STEAM MILL

TWILIGHT, no sound but the steam mill ; then the door opens half-way, the miller's wife looks out.

A young woman with a white, strained face peering at one through a flicker of candle-light, a child clinging to her dress ; and still the dull sound of machinery.

“ . . . A bed ? ”

In the pause one can see the red dahlias darken, the first star shines over the mill. How pale the child is ! A desolate spot this, seven miles from anywhere.

The woman speaks at last. “ Come inside. I'll see.” She leads the way into a cheerless, crowded sitting-room, sparkling with gilt frames.

There is the usual mud-coloured paper with its pattern of brown roses, but a superior sideboard, a “ chiffonnier ” ; lamplight shines on the red velvet sofa, giving a sharp cold look to the antimacassars. Red glass vases stand each side of a bamboo shelf, filled with paper roses.

The miller's wife thrusts her face towards me, eager, thin, pale, full of some changing spirit that gathers and wanes as the candle flickers. She is desperately anxious to express something, this room is her effort—these bronze statuettes, and

marble-topped cupboards, that oleograph of an eagle—but in the struggle she is worn to a shadow!

“Well,” she says suddenly, “you can share my bed, how’ll that do?”

Not for the world would one offend her, but it is natural to ask what the miller will say . . .

“My ‘usband? ’E never says nothing—’e works all day. Besides—’e’s in the other room with my little girl; I’ve got the baby.”

A fretful, restless sound begins, and then one sees a baby in a wicker cradle by the fire . . . “Hush! hush!” says the mother. In one moment both the children are crying. “They’re sleepy, an’ ‘ungry,” she tells, smiling a strange smile that lights her pale face. And she darts from the fire to the baby, from the cupboard to the kitchen, running with a kettle and a shawl; her dead gold hair gleams in the firelight, it is fashionably done. She wears a holland pinafore fastened with a silver brooch.

At seven o’clock she goes to call the miller.

It is dark outside, fog in the valley, a faint scent of white jasmine comes in; there is a heavy footstep—her husband.

A young, handsome man, with a bold chin, and a smile in his eyes, a faint sneer round his lips, and the secret awkwardness of the “superior” man in the presence of a lady. Shepherds meet one simply, but the man who has worked his way up has to conceal himself with chaff. So the miller offers his own bed with a kind of awkward levity.

“Don’t be so silly!” says his wife; she hands the jam, and he passes the silver jam spoon.

No corduroys and rough shirt for him, but the clothes of a town clerk. He talks with grave approval of politics, and lighting a cigarette, strolls out to lock up the mill.

His wife has been rocking the baby, her head framed by a brown curtain worked with worsted daffodils. It is strange to go from this room to their kitchen, to see her wrestling with saucepans and dirty plates, staggering under the weight of a huge black kettle put on for the baby's bath. And to watch her smooth her hands afterwards with scented cream !

At ten o'clock the miller comes for his supper ; a serviette placed for their visitor, and silver from a green-lined plate basket. Ale and a dry-looking cake for the miller . . . And then up steep stairs to the front bedroom ; a lady's room, lavender toilet soap, little lace-edge mats, bronze candlesticks, muslin blinds, lace curtains . . . The child crying all the time, and one thinks : " Poor woman ! I've been five hours in her house, she hasn't sat down yet, except to eat—and then she was feeding the baby. This fight for appearances will kill her." " I'm always at it," she says, " cookin', scrubbin', cleanin', washin' the clothes, all day." Her face looks like a white flame.

She undoes her hair, long and dull ; it reaches to her knees. The baby cries again.

" I've had three in two years," she says. " One died, from me bicycling. We can't afford no more. We're savin'—to buy our piano ! "

" You've come from a town ? "

" Yes, 'social evenin's' . . . but it's lonely here ;

there's not a soul I can speak to . . . Oh, I want !——”

And suddenly clutching me in bed : “ Are you afraid of the dark ? I am ; things look so *bizarre !* ”

VII

TRANSFORMATION

THE smell of a town has a hot, sour taint—a mixture of oranges and shoe leather, beer and buns, and at some narrow corner—codfish.

Having tramped to Chichester for a train tonight, I was waiting on the platform when a girl ran up to me.

“Has the train gone?” she panted.

A whistle sounded, people on the platform clutched their bags, the train rushed in. I saw the girl trying hard to turn one of the brass handles—I turned it for her and we got in together.

“Are you sure it’s right?” She was on the point of getting out. But the guard slammed the door shut, waved his flag, and we were off.

“I thought I’d missed it,” she kept saying, “and whatever I should do if I missed it I don’t know! I should lose my place!”

After a pause, more shyly: “I’ve been to Chichester to see auntie; I don’t live there.”

“Have you to be in at a certain time?”

“Oh, yes! Got to be in by half-past eight. It’s the first time ‘she’s’ let me go for a whole day. I mustn’t be late, must I?”

Another silence, and then—confidentially:

“I go to bed at half-past nine.”

It wasn’t easy to watch her, for her eyes always

caught mine half-way, and they shone so ; if I met them full her whole face quivered.

She was pale, tall and weedy, having outgrown her strength. Dressed very neatly ; and in her white blouse, with white roses on a pink straw hat, she reminded me of the little "star of Bethlehem" flower.

She was "housemaid," she told me, "in a big house at Bognor."

When she thrust a bag of chocolates into my lap and told me to "have them all !" her eyes shone like rain in the sun ; they kept changing colour—clear grey, then green, then darkest blue.

Her home, she told me, was in the Midlands.

"Bognor train on the right," we were told at Barnham, and got in together again ; but the train didn't start. The girl jumped out : "It can't be right," she cried. "Do ask !"

I asked the engine-driver : "All right, waitin' for the Brighton train. Troops passin'. Everythin' late."

"Oh, what shall I do ? I shall lose my place !"

Her long back drooped, her head hung forward, her face was pinched with worry.

Barnham is a draughty station, but she wouldn't get into the train ; perhaps she hoped another would appear suddenly on the opposite side and start sooner !

A clock struck the half-hour

"Why ! Perhaps the door'll be shut on me ! . . . If I miss the train I shall lose my character ! And then——?"

People standing about stamped their feet, men

looked at their watches, one or two went to the bar ; they had all left hats or bags or newspapers in the corner seats they meant to come back to.

“ It’s not your fault,” I told the poor girl. “ You must say to your mistress that the Brighton train was late, and we were made to wait—— ” But now her mouth was open, her eyes searched the rails ; a cold, dirty wind flying through the station pulled her hair loose.

“ But do get in ! ” I begged her.

Just then the Brighton train roared in our ears ; crowds of soldiers began running across the platform ; before I could catch her hand the girl was engulfed in them.

She lost her head, screamed, and rushed straight at a big man’s chest. I saw his arms go up to steady her, and I saw her startled face, very white, all eyes, and one rose in her hat blown loose, flapping. The other soldiers, who could see it all, were laughing ; her eyes fluttered to the man who held her. I just caught sight of his bent, red neck ; he had kissed her.

I shouted to the girl ; the guard shouted. I leant right out and felt a queer leap in my pulse when I heard her giggle.

Her eyes were shining like crystal, her face flushed scarlet, not an ounce of memory left, nor thought ; only excitement ! Contact ! The unknown !

The star of Bethlehem had become a wild geranium !

I was rushing to her when the guard slammed the door, the train moved, and she was left—on the platform with the soldiers.

VIII

HEART-BREAKER

A STRANGER, a man in a bowler hat and respectable black cloth coat, arrived at the White Mill one Saturday evening. He tried the miller's doorway ; it was fastened. He walked all round the small, one-storied cottage that stood like a pale old toadstool in the shadow of the mill. Corn grew at the back, in front was a crumbling cliff that had taken the garden gate that year, a low, dry cliff, incessantly falling : "Shouldn't care to live here," thought the strange gentleman ; ". . . I'd feel the walls were coming down every time a wave broke ! "

He stood still to listen to the sea. It was far out, lying in the pale white trance of a windless day when clouds obscure the sun. He had to put his hand to his eyes, for the glare, at moments when the mist thinned the water, leaped with a flash like metal. "I should go mad—looking at that all day," he mused, and was struck by the vast emptiness of miles of sand. A few gulls were scavenging at the edge of the tide ; when one flew up with a harsh cry the townsman in the bowler hat felt his heart sink unaccountably.

He looked away at the flag-staff and saw the flag hanging limp, dead.

With a feeling of vexation, as if he had seen more than he meant to see, he stamped out down the narrow path between the marigolds and faced the old White Mill.

It was a landmark for that part of Sussex, set up on a high foundation of solid whitewashed bricks, with a little white gallery running round under the sails and a small window ; a double door faced the sea, and the stranger pushed open the upper half and looked in.

The mill was dark with the inevitable darkness of a village church, but the stranger saw a thick white floury dust spread over the shadows as if the soul of the mill had gone to seed ; there were long black straps at strange angles, all covered with dust, and close to him a wooden ladder leading to the next floor. He went up it. His hands and the ends of his trousers were soon whitened like the beams. On the second landing he paused to look through a window, the corn seemed already a long way below.

Right at the top he found the great stone wheels that only move when a gale is blowing, and there, stooping over them, feeling their roughness with his floury fingers, was the miller. When he turned at the sound of the stranger's footsteps and saw the stranger's head come up the ladder-hole, their faces were level for a moment.

Men who have to do with the weather get an odd far-sighted look ; you see it in gardeners and sailors. Miller Munday's eyes looked through the stranger's now. Blue-green eyes in a white floury face, under a white cap, above a thin, freckled nose,

whose sharp point dominated a seedy-looking red moustache. A haggard face, calamitous ; it stared at the stranger during one of those moments that seem ages long, then a silly smile broke over it.

"Mr. Munday ?" asked the visitor.

"Yes, sir."

"The mill's not working ?"

"No, sir."

"Machinery in order ?"

"Yes, sir."

"I particularly wanted to see it working."

Miller Munday turned his chalk-white face to a little window. "No, sir," he answered.

"Well, well," said the stranger, "show me over."

For half an hour the two men crept about, their footsteps lost in the white dust, heads bent, passing in and out of the huge machinery like human spiders ; at the slightest sound the miller's chin turned up and he stood listening. If so much as a whisper pierced the mist the white sails groaned, but they couldn't turn. ". . . Is this bin airtight ?" the stranger questioned, tapping here and there with his finger nails. When the two men came out the sun was shining fully so that the boards of the mill were warm to touch. The stranger had a rather commiserating look, as if he had something on his mind, but the miller appeared enlivened by company. "Lots of people come," he said, "an' proper scared o' the wheels goin' roun' if she's workin' ; but the wind's dead now."

"Ah, poor return from all these southern mills," murmured the stranger.

"An' a man can't help it!" cried the miller. He was hanging over the lower half of the white wooden doorway now, resting an arm on it, his legs crossed behind it, and his face looking out against the shadows.

"I know the owner thinks it's my fault if the return's low! But I don't care! He can turn me out if he likes. I've lived here forty years—that's nothin'! 'Return below the average,' that's all he thinks about. . . . Do you know what the mill's called? 'Heart-breaker!'—broke every miller's heart what's had to do with her."

The miller laughed silently, showing uneven teeth.

"You're fond of your mill?" asked the visitor.

"Oh, no!" grinned the miller, "she's nothin' to me, the old White Mill; why it's only boards and bricks and machinery. . . . Folks say she 'as a spite against men." His green eyes slipped past the visitor's common-place face and looked out to sea; his voice grew confidential.

"One miller here had his head chopped off. 'Twas as still as this; he step up outside, an' a squall come up an' tossed 'er great sails round an' killed 'im. . . . Ha! they say she done it 'cause he'd married a wife!"

"Are you married?"

The torn, haunted look that had been on his face at their meeting came back.

"I'm marrying. . . . One miller—a hundred years ago an' more—tried to do it without 'er knowin'. Kept his wife in there—they say, a pretty girl . . . she died."

Both men smiled at this, and the sails of the windmill groaned ; far away, the flag on the flagstaff stirred as if in sympathy. When the visitor put a question about Munday's marriage the miller glanced up uneasily. " Speak it soft," his attitude said, while he muttered : " . . . Old wives' tales . . . " The visitor was about to say something more but the miller broke in.

" I've lain in the dark in my hovel an' thought—a man must be master if he wants to live ! . . . I've been careful, I've put by—for what ? Because I mean to buy 'er ! " He smacked his hand on the bricks. " Be a master-miller and make my mark, 'stead o' passin' every penny to some rich gen'leman as doesn't know a mill from a mushroom ! Buy 'er an' run 'er myself. She was built for power ! You should see her great stone wheels when the equinox is blowin'. When I'm master-miller here, the woman . . . I want . . . will wed me."

" Mr. Munday——"

" Oh, yes," interrupted the miller, " . . . I've told 'er. And five minutes after I told 'er the wind went down. Ha ! ha ! d'you think I care ? She've been silent an' sulky, the old ' Heart-breaker,' she's plannin' somethin'. I been up in 'er listenin' . . . these days when a man can't work . . . "

" I'm afraid I must tell you the mill's been sold."

" Sold ? " The miller's cheeks fell in, his red moustache set crooked drooped like a false one put on badly ; some vision he had stared at for hours broke suddenly.

" Yes," said his visitor, " bought by Messrs. Cark and Sharp, who are putting her parts up for

sale by auction. I came over to look at the zinc and metal work . . ." His words were stopped by a sudden gust of wind that whipped his hat off ; when he returned from chasing it the great white sails were turning slowly, the miller had disappeared.

The buyer of zinc and metal work looked at the flag ; it had come to life and was tugging and flapping. He looked out to sea and saw that the tide had come in ; it appeared to be hurrying, every thin level wave ran up faster and died foaming softly. A most pale but heavenly colour had crept into the sea, like life returning, the sunshine slanted on the sand, and a piece of paper caught by the wind rolled away down the coast for a mile. Slowly, with growing velocity, a great rushing, roaring, creaking, filled the townsman's ears, and his fascinated eyes watched the sails going round, faster and faster and faster ; the mill itself seemed the source of the gale ; every time the white sail clove the air a fresh wind sped away like a skein of silk cut loose ! The townsman felt it whistle through his hair.

He felt his heart lift strangely with each revolution of the sails, lift and sink ; he forgot about zinc and metal work. One peep inside the mill made him hurry away ; it was like seeing the intestines of a live, throbbing creature, hearing its great lungs breathing, watching the pulse of its arteries, standing under its beating heart—while a hundred wheels went round.

At that moment a horn blew along the coast ; it was time to leave off work. There's a saying that the wind always blows on a Sunday or at sundown

when the miller locks up, but that night the sails worked longer.

The visitor went back to town ; he forgot the mill, and only remembered the miller with a feeling of discomfort on returning to the coast three months later for the sale. It was a damp, dark October afternoon, the wind coming and going in fitful gusts, the waves rolling the stones ; the mill's white body stood as usual, but the sails had been unfastened and were lying on the grass. At each moment a man carried out some portion of her anatomy, while in the dusty twilight of the lower story workmen were disembowelling her. Buyers stood examining her parts. One had bought the woodwork, another was giving his price for the bricks : "To be removed by me as soon as Mr. Judd 'as taken the boards away . . ."

The townsman was hurrying to make his bid for the metal when he saw the miller.

Munday was standing high on the gallery with his arms spread upon the body of the mill in an attitude of mad defence. His cap had fallen off and his red head shone like copper ; with his cheek against the boards he could hear the strangers talking in the body of his mill, unhooking straps, testing beams, tapping the huge stone wheels at the top ; he could hear them laughing, jingling their money.

At the buyer's shout he turned a madman's face that stared for an instant at the sails on the grass.

Next moment he had leaped on top of them.

IX

MRS. NIGHTINGALE

COMPANY is never so sweet as after a day on the road. To drop down into one of these Sussex villages at night and see their black chimneys against the moon ; to hear a man laugh, and an old woman's "good avenin' to ye——"

And then there comes the moment when I ring the vicarage bell to ask recommendation to a lodging. A tramp is shown into the "study," that dark room full of books on sermons and "devotions," with a lithograph of Murillo's Madonna and a text : "The Lord God will judge the righteous . . ." The door opens — and the righteous enters.

The vicar sees a girl tramp with an old fish-basket ; the tramp sees a man with reticent eyes and a chilly smile that says plainly : "Pray don't tell me about it if you don't want to ! "

The request for lodgings is met with a moment's deep hesitation ; he seems brooding over each of his parish in turn, with a furtive glance to see what sort of strange bird the tramp is.

Then with a queer little sigh, as if he had swallowed some lump of conscience, he will begin :

"There's Mrs. Snook, down the lane, or Mrs. Nightingale . . . Did you walk here ? "

“ Yes.”

“ To . . . see the church ? ”

“ To see these trees by moonlight.”

He looks more queerly than ever ; but perhaps on his shelves there is a favourite author, common ground is enough. After that he will show you to the door himself and point you your way to Mrs Nightingale’s.

Then begins the sweetness of *camaraderie* . . . Mrs. Nightingale ! Bent over her dying fire, all scared at your sudden appearance, and four cats swearing and spitting ! But a smile to the old is sufficient, and cats make friends easily ; it takes Mrs. Nightingale ten minutes to remember that she *has* a room. She gasps, “ Dear, dear ! . . . ” and passes her skinny hands over her hips ; her face quivers but her old eyes smile. “ Eighty-nine next birthday ”—she reiterates like a child telling a secret.

Oh, the creaking, groaning moment when she takes the candle and totters to the stairs ! They wind up from the kitchen, and there’s a delicious smell of apples. Mrs. Nightingale doesn’t rightly know what she ought to do about it, but she is trustful like a child—and a day on the Downs gives a tramp’s face open qualities.

“ Here’s the room—’tis all aired,” she tells, “ an’ rainwater in the jug, an’ winder open at top, ’cause we lives that way.” She lays her palsied hand on the mountainous white bed. “ Sleep well,” she says, “ sleep well ! ”

And the last thing I hear is the wind in the trees, the cry of a cat ; the last thing I see—the flicker

of the dripping candle, the dim, mouse-quiet room.

Tramps shut their eyes and sleep like the birds.

It seems one minute, Mrs. Nightingale is knocking at the door to say the sun shines.

Breakfast ! Not solitude in that tomb of gentility, the front room, but bacon and eggs, and a brown teapot, with Mrs. Nightingale at the kitchen table. There's a little bunch of green herbs hung on a nail, "king of the forest," she calls it. It has spiced the whole room.

Kittens roll in the sunlight, tumbling over a long-haired tabby, who lays back his ears. "Not their father," she tells. "Not father to nobody ; 'e's a bachelor, this one, that's 'is sister."

And I begin eating with a black-handled fork, sun in my eyes, joy of life in my heart.

Dear Mrs. Nightingale !

Her lips shake all the time she is laughing, her old face, coloured like pale leather, breaks into a thousand wrinkles, her blue, deep-set eyes shine simply. She wears her hair in a chignon.

A wasp stung her finger yesterday, but she "don't make much of it ! "

That golden moment early in the garden down where the grass grows long (because her man is dead and she is too old to cut it). A white hen scratching in the bushes, the scent of rosemary, the sound of wind in the woods.

There, with purple asters and a background of dahlias, blood-red and gold—one catches autumn laughing ! Blue sky, sun on the dew, white shining

clouds flying over the green wood. A swallow darts out.

I turn, and all the birds start singing suddenly ; there's an old figure at the gate . . . Mrs. Nightingale, with an apple in her hand, to bid me God-speed on my journey.

X

GENTEEL

CHERRY trees grow on the walls running round the Misses Jellicoe's strip of back garden : marigold and sweet-william edge the border in front.

Whenever any of her old pupils came to tea, opening the door herself, she would stand on tiptoe, her chin strained to the farthest extent of her long throat, her eyebrows raised to the roots of her hair, and pipe incredulously :

“ Why ! I do believe she’s grown ! The elegant creature ! ”

I had arrived again ; this was the road, the same sweet-william. I had to struggle with old memories before I had courage to pull the bell.

The house was built on the time-honoured pattern—a long passage, laid with brown oilcloth, one front room, one back, and up a few stairs a tiny sitting-room.

There came a patter of feet ; some one peeped through the glass ; the door opened ; Miss Jellicoe stood on her toes ! In another moment she was kissing my cheeks, rubbing her lean ones affectionately up and down on them. When the door was shut and the peculiar ancient smell of furniture had crept to me, I felt that I had stepped back a hundred years. The faded green armchair still

faced the little round table, where "Stepping Heavenwards" lay and a volume of sacred verse by Frances Ridley Havergal. The inlaid cabinet stood in a corner with a tall blue-and-gold French vase full of honesty ; a similar vase on a similar cabinet occupied the opposite corner. Under its glass shade the same gold clock, which never went, but still pointed to half-past six. There were the same fringes with tassels. On a slab, covered with glass, two nude females in Parian marble reposed, the one on a tiger, the other on a lion. Fans, yellowed photographs, bulrushes, were pinned on the walls ; the green worsted apple, the artificial white rose, still stood on a shelf, where everything was arranged in pairs, with a taller vase between them. . . .

"Ah ! Here comes Alys ! Alys, my dear, this is the little girl who used to weep over her dictation. Shall we adjourn to tea ? "

Miss Alys Jellicoe, the elder sister, bustled in, a constant smile fixed imperturbably on her round little face, her eyes screwed up, a tight band of black curls hanging perpendicularly across her forehead. She gave me a delicate peck on each cheek. Miss Felicia, in just the attitude I remembered, leaned over the arm of her chair and spoke languidly, drawling her words, arranging her wispy hair with long thin fingers.

"Come !—to the banquet hall !" She got up stiffly, curving her arm like a shy young man. "Shall I manipulate the teapot ? Sugar ? You don't ! Fashionable lady, *terrible* creature ! Alys, she doesn't take sugar ! "

The same talk, the same pale-grey pastry fingers
 “Your rhubarb jam!” I almost whispered.

“Aunt Issyt’s recipe,” piped Miss Alys.

“Everything going on as usual?”

“Oh, we’ve got some very elegant young men in the parish, and a personage from Australia next door. It *is* Australia: she uses the superfluous feathers to decorate for pictures!”

“And one long one over the looking-glass,” prompted Miss Alys. “Such a singular idea!”

When we had finished, Miss Felicia spread her thin arms and “shooed” me along the passage, holding out the sides of her rhubarb-coloured dress, with its wide band of velvet round the bottom.

“Shall we have a little dumb crambo? Or are we too ‘grown-up’?” Miss Felicia drew the corners of her mouth down, assuming severity, I knew it was coming; an old memory smote me when, clutching my hand, she scuttled away making a great noise, as one does to provoke mirth—at a children’s party.

Both the Misses Jellicoe loved to act; indeed, their life was one long charade. Dressing up, looking haughty, mincing their steps, delicately portraying the “grand dame” was no more acting than their staid intercourse with Martha, the maid, or the airy, impersonal manner with which they discussed economy alone together. Miss Felicia particularly delighted in acting the “naughty child,” who roars, “Ma-ma! I want to go home!” She would also descend to tramping around with a thick stick, growling “Evenin’,

Garge!" as the British workman, or with a mackintosh and a silent scowl, as a foreigner.

Presently, Miss Alys set out our cold supper in the back room.

"We can finish up these little pies," I heard her murmur.

"Martha is out. Shall we wash up this evening?"

She always said this in a surprised tone of voice. "Yes, if you care to," Miss Felicia would answer, collecting the plates as casually as possible. They washed up every night.

Lying in my huge feather bed, opposite the bell-rope fringe which hung above the window, I seemed to have gone back to some ancient genteel age when, in nightcaps and with looped bed-curtains, the Misses Jellicoe were high priestesses to the Goddess of Propriety.

The first meal of the day was eaten early, in the "breakfast-room"—a small space at the back of the house, rather crowded with furniture; it had a terra-cotta patterned wallpaper, and much draping of mantelpiece, shelves, and piano with thin old materials, so worn and faded that one knew no name to give them. A painting of a slanting cross with a text rolled round it and a white Madonna lily resting on it hung over the door; also a seaweed picture, which had been the envy of my life when I was little.

When this meal was finished, Miss Alys put on her stylish toque—made at home, very bright and attractive, the black crown of an old hat with some sky-blue ribbon tied round and three cream roses.

Her plump person was usually buttoned into something tight and beaded ; her face always shone like the sun, and she carried herself and her fat black curls with "an air." Miss Felicia wore drooping clothes, sleeves with two puffs and long frills of lace, full skirts, and hats which one felt instinctively to have been poke bonnets flattened out to suit the fashion, and which one wouldn't have altered for the world. She trimmed them herself ; a wispy rosebud, an astonished pansy . . . She always lingered in her walking, swinging her dress. "Oh ! there's no hurry," was her favourite expression, drawled ever so slightly in her genteel, modulated voice. She looked casually at trees and houses which she had passed every day for nineteen years, and went to her teaching down the straight lane, with its low thorn hedges, as though she were a young damsel of olden time strolling languidly in the shade for pleasure.

Their lives were so placid that the dropping of a crumb made talk for half an hour ; true excitement, such as the annual choir treat, the loosening of the vicar's front tooth, Miss Tweedy's hand-glass cracking, though no one had touched it—all this was rare ; so that, from the added languor in Miss Felicia's gentility, an added breath in Miss Alys' manner, I quickly became conscious of something new and even more stupendous. Then I learned what had happened—Miss Alys had bought land ! One of a number of strips opening on to a cart track, labelled "Gordon Avenue," its further boundary a muddy little tidal stream, which had become a "stretch of water, with my lawn sloping

down to it." The drawing-room windows would face west—every sunset was a pageant!

Nowadays circulars and long official-looking envelopes would arrive for her. Miss Felicia treated them airily ; Miss Alys would dimple all over her face, her rosy cheeks shining.

This sort of conversation passed between them :

" Dear me ! A letter for you, Alys."

" One of those agents, I daresay." Miss Alys took her long envelope delicately.

" Somebody wishing to purchase—oh ! this man will sell my house for me. He has clients wanting —let me see—'fourteen bedrooms, stabling, motor-shed, timbered land amounting to not less than fifty acres' . . . I'm afraid that will hardly do——"

" Shall you answer it ? "

" No, dear, it is wasting a stamp ; I did answer three at first, if you remember."

Miss Felicia, whose front ends of hair were wound round a curler and lay on her forehead like a large snail, threw the envelope in the fender and went away to dress. Lingered, I saw Miss Alys rise softly and pick up the circular, staring fascinated at the purple ink, a ruminating light in her eyes, her placid features touched with an indulgent smile—"fourteen bedrooms !" It was pleasant to dream. But, looking up, she saw me there.

" Do you know, we have started building our foundations," she said, and her whole nature seemed to overflow in her beaming smile.

Late that same evening Miss Alys slipped into the back kitchen and returned with a bulging fish-basket hidden under her cloak. She beckoned

to me, a self-important, secretive little smile playing round her lips ; then she let us both out and closed the garden gate very softly.

From far over the sands the low noise of running water drifted up through the twilight ; then I saw the notice-board "Gordon Avenue." We had come to her own strip of land. There was a dim reflection of sunset in the muddy little creek beyond. She glanced to see that no one was looking, then, standing quite still in the long grass, wrapped in her cloak, she opened the basket and poured out its contents of broken bottles, bits of brick and slate, on to another little pile of rubbish at our feet ; gazing at it with a tender, speculative, almost reverential smile.

These were the foundations.

XI

SPRING EVENING

THE Misses Jellicoe never walk, they stroll. If Miss Alys sometimes hurries, it is less "quick walking," than a little human motor cycle bouncing along. Miss Felicia will some day stroll into Paradise with a lily in her hand at the same pace at which we took our Sunday walk to-night. Her great-grandmother couldn't have stepped it more languidly the first time she wore the Paisley shawl that is now Miss Felicia's "best frock." The silky fringes of this frock swish against the silky folds; any young man walking by should have his head turned.

"How lovely it is when summer comes!" was Miss Felicia's text for the conversation . . . "And the poor hot sheep!" Miss Alys'.

Something of the "war-spirit" has got into our talk; we read continually of attacks and counter-attacks, so our speech is sharp and thrusting. Miss Alys' "attack" delivered always with a delightful smile, Miss Felicia's "counter-attack" with imperturbable nonchalance; it isn't only the mathematical problem of bread and flour allowance worked out at breakfast-time; each incident of the day becomes a Vimy Ridge, or an acute Soissons. So with the sheep; "They don't mind me!" Miss

Alys' first thrust. "They can't see you, perhaps," Miss Felicia's reply (Felicia being tall and Alys short). "Ah, they always run away when they see *you*." "They remove themselves politely, if that's what you mean?" "Some people mean what they say." "Really, what a novelty!" (The buttercups are trodden rather hard by Alys.) "Novelty is sometimes synonymous with truth. I said the sheep——" Miss Felicia's chief bomb is a big yawn; it produces instant explosion in Miss Alys, and the battle continues—until Alys gets the last word.

This evening the weather was so lovely that Felicia yielded soon, and we strolled on down a lovers' lane of grass between deep ditches full of iris leaves and thick green may. The blackthorn blossom is over, but the wild orchids are coming out; there are blue hyacinths in the long grass, and pale mauve "cuckoo flower," and here and there "May-marigolds." The vetch is showing, too, and speedwell, and star of Bethlehem; oaks have fed on gold this month—their leaves are such a colour.

Miss Alys is the bee or butterfly of country scenes, darting continually from flower to flower; Miss Felicia is a "fair lady," stepping on gems. Rustic bridges were made for such as she.

We had to cross one, and midway she leaned on the wooden rail and let her hands fall limp and white. The water went slowly, the grass was still, the sun shone on old, worm-eaten planks, flies spun over the flowering rushes, and young bullocks in the next field sniffed at us; we could see their amiable wet noses and smell their breath.

Miss Alys was behind us somewhere hovering

over the last primrose or the first little wild geranium ; Felicia was looking at three alder trees, and all at once I saw her long back shiver under its biscuit-coloured gown. Her hands didn't dangle, they clutched the rail ; her chin turned upward and her smiling open mouth suggested a child of six years old when he first catches sight of a Christmas tree.

"Is it a Zeppelin ?" I asked.

"A picture!" breathed Miss Felicia ; she was looking at the alder tree, and I understood that the leaping of its million leaves had "caught" her ; these moments are the kisses of an old maid's life.

The trees themselves were young and the leaves small, having a faint brown gloss on their shining sides, and the sound they made was like sheets of rain slashing on a house-top ! With sun on our necks this showering noise was delicious : "I shall paint that," said Miss Felicia. And then she told me they had joined a sketching club—she said it languidly though her blue eyes sparkled. "Only amateurs, of course, but a real artist judges our pictures. We disguise ourselves. Alys chose 'Pineapple' for her *nom-de-plume*. I'm 'Dewberry.' One gentleman—'Cox's orange pippin'—is so good ! You can eat off a plate if he paints it. You can see every thread in his table-cloth . . . We do 'still life,' you know, as well as 'landscape.' Now for next month the subjects set are : 'Evening Prayer,' 'A Garden Roller,' 'Full Moon' and 'A Country Road.' I can turn this river into a road, and make those rushes dock leaves, and that bank a hedge, and then those three alder trees——"

"But their reflection . . . ? "

"Dear, dear!—then I shall make a road behind them—Alys!"

Alys thought they'd do for "Evening Prayer"—with a church tower put in, but then Miss Felicia had an inspiration. "'Full Moon' of course!"

"We must show you what we've done," she said; and my heart sank.

There are certain pictures that face me every morning in the breakfast-room, water colours painted like oils and thick with Chinese-white; there's a man in a horrible Panama hat, with a hand half the size of his nose . . . We talked of "Art": Alys, of course, had always been an "Artist" . . . "though you did everything wrong!" Miss Felicia reminded her.

"Not at all, I merely belonged to a different school of painting."

When Alys says "Not at all" in that staccato tone, it means battle, and not all the rippling of the leaves or the passing of the swallows can arrest her. Our moment on the bridge was ended, and we turned back to church, and all the way we had "water-colour paintings" poured out on us; not from a "narrow standpoint," but "broad-mindedly," as became an artist who could "do it both ways."

"Mr. Pomroy doesn't care for the use of Chinese-white for high lights or fruit blossom; it's a matter of taste, of course. Mr. Pomroy doesn't care for the use of indigo blue for summer skies; that again is a matter of personal feeling. Mr. Pom . . ."

I began to watch a little white cloud coming,

Felicia began to whistle ; Alys, like many persistent talkers, often wins this kind of victory—and then is astonished when the subject crops up to-morrow that we still “know nothing” about it.

“There are ‘realists’ and ‘idealists,’ ” Miss Alys told us. I gathered that Alys was an idealist with a natural talent for realism : “If I see grass I like to *paint* it as grass . . .” “Alys likes to paint all the buttercups !”—this from Felicia, with her eyes rolled up.

“Not *all*,” corrected Alys, “that would be impossible. Why . . .”

Felicia sat down suddenly under a small wild damson tree. “I shan’t go to church to-night,” she drawled. “I mean to see the sunset.”

Alys was startled. “Miss a service ? Impossible ! . . .”

Yet—was Felicia as an artist beating her ? . . . All artists, they say, are “immoral.”

XII

TWILIGHT

WHEN the sun has gone down and thin mists have risen from the marshes, a distorted water willow, leaning over a stream, will make one shudder at its goblin ugliness. It gives a "scarey" sensation, as though one's hair rose in astonishment, and there is an inner shrinking. I had this feeling one night in a dingy passage, coming suddenly face to face with Miss Jellicoe's great-aunt.

(It was late autumn, and I had run down to my old governess for a breath of the sea.)

"We must introduce you," piped Miss Alys. "Aunt Issyt, of whom you have heard in your childhood." Then shouting very loud: "This—was Felicia's—pupil."

The old face in front of me blinked and contracted, drew back into itself, gathering force; then slowly, with infinite pains, was stretched out the length of a little withered neck, and thrust into mine.

"Eh? . . . What?" She articulated slowly, anxiously, the round eyes wide as hollows in a pollarded tree.

Miss Alys filled her lungs again and made a trumpet of her hands: "*Pupil!*!" The word was screamed, a hundred lines broke and wrinkled and

passed like a ripple of water over the ancient, yellow face. It had comprehended. It was trying to smile !

When I got away from that interview I had a sick feeling. The musty smell of the rooms, the heavy furniture, seemed unbearable.

At supper, I gathered that this old lady had outlived her small fortune. There was no word of hardship. "We had a letter from the vicar of her parish," drawled Felicia, "so we went to see. I fancy she had been living uncomfortably : the people were noisy—a carpenter's shop ; and the doctor said the hammering had caused her deafness. She has no one left but us—we brought her home. It was the only thing to do. Oh, yes, the only thing to do."

Both Miss Alys and Miss Felicia said this deprecatingly. They spoke quietly, as usual. It was no great matter to clothe and feed an aged aunt, even if to do it one went without supper and ate bread and cheese. It was "duty."

They treated her generously at table, but Miss Felicia's languid tone she never could catch ; it was Alys who talked to her, with the most perfectly controlled patience I have ever heard. They were halting, difficult conversations ; the old woman longed to join in when we were chatting ; she made painful efforts to understand.

I sat opposite, and I could see her lips draw together, move and shape themselves, long before she had mastery enough to form the word ; and all the time, because these lips were so trembling, she tried to talk with her eyes.

"Living uncomfortably,"—starvation, the eyes were caverns under her brow, her neck was like string, her long hands were shrivelled bone.

At tea-time Miss Alys would say :

"Felicia is going to the choir practice ; she won't be back until seven o'clock."

"Until twelve ?"—"*Seven*"—"Twelve ?"—the old face aghast with the horror of all the things it couldn't understand—

"*Seven !*" (Miss Alys growing red).

"I didn't catch the first part. I'm just a little deaf. Felicia was *what ?*"

Or it was some trifle : "Will you have cake ?" That was shouted ten times, understood as "tooth-ache ?" "The garden rake ?"—"A bed to make ?"—then as a calamity, something dreadful which she had never heard of ; and, finally, given up, with trembling deprecation, a dim, ancient smile, that said :

"I know I'm not quite 'up-to-date'—but I was young once !" It was to me that this smile was turned ; she felt drawn to me, seeing in me that precious youth that she cherished in herself ; it was a bond between us.

"I suppose I'm very old now ?" she would say, with a sort of wistful levity. "But, you know, I don't *feel* old—I can still walk."

(She tottered every day a few yards to the sea ; at each step one expected her to crumble away.)

She always tried to be arch with me, putting her head on one side, blinking, smiling like a tortured Indian ; and then recounting word by word, with

gasps and pauses, and deep swallowings, some distant memory : “ How she had walked as far as one could see, how she had picked blackberries for a tart, and how good blackberries were then—and how they had no flavour now . . . ”

In the morning, when she ventured out to the sun, her face looked yellower—her old black cloak was green in places ; over her scanty hair was tied a flat, brown straw thing that had been sat upon and squashed.

Her hands shook very much when she got to the sea, and her round eyes turned about apprehensively, searching its cold width and depth.

She was very little trouble in the house, very quiet. She would sit in a shaded corner, on a horse-hair chair, a little black shawl pinned over her chest ; and her vanity—a bit of plaid ribbon, so dim that one saw it through webs of time. Part of the furniture, of the musty smell of mould and wood-rot. It was the fingers of her generation which had knitted woolly mats, hammered bell-rope fringe above the windows, fans to the walls ; which had sewed up the aspidistra flower-pot in lamp-shade paper. And the chairs with elegantly curved legs, the ornamented, wheezing piano, the picture of “ Faith, Hope, and Charity,” were things that belonged to her time.

One day, in her room, I was shown an oil painting of a young face, leaning forward ; brown ringlets fell on each side. The cheeks had a bloom like peaches, the nose was a little long, the red lips, drawn together demurely, held a shade of mockery. But the eyes ! Large and brown, soft as a young

gazelle ! This had been “Auntie”—in the morning of her life.

“She was a poetess,” they told me ; “a fiery poetess—so active. She used to love the sea, and now she didn’t seem to care for it.”

Walking was still the one thing she clung to, telling us each day how far she had gone. Her old mind found speech difficult, but she could move her limbs.

It was late autumn now ; nights began to close in early, the gales were cold. Some easterly wind must have caught her across the back, for she complained of pains in her shoulder. We shouted “Rheumatism—lots of old people had it !” She sat all that afternoon in the corner, more shrunken than usual, her eyes had a wide, scared look, her lips were pressed tremblingly together, brooding.

I felt that something dark and undistinguishable was going on in that dim brain. At tea she broke in on us : “Had *we* ever had a pain in our leg—up here ? ”

“Of course we had ! That was nothing ! ”

“A little cold,” said Felicia casually.

She took that word to bed with her, but I could picture her—staring at the dark.

“A little cold,” she said to me next day, nodding her head. “Had I ever had a cold ? But it *was* a cold—Alys told her she had a cold in her head, that was why she couldn’t hear—Alys said it would go—”

And all the time her blinking, owlish eyes searched mine.

On the stairs, in the passage, she would stop me

and whisper—as though it were some dreadful secret : “ I’ve got it here ! ” or “ It’s in my arm to-day ! ” And she would mouth at me, to express her wonder. At table she was full of a sort of desperate hopefulness ; there was none of the apathy of age in her face—she was being pinched, and bruised, and gnawed with a new activity—Pain !

We spoke together of her, in our normal voices, while she hung for comfort upon the dumb shape of our words, still muttering that “ It was going — ” If we agreed with her she fell silent.

Then there came a morning when her daily walk to the sea failed.

“ Well ! ” we said ; “ but when the spring comes ? ”

She was so stiff that we had almost to carry her down. Miss Alys sent for the doctor.

Lamps and fires were always postponed until dark, so at tea that afternoon we sat in the half-light, Aunt Issyt facing the window.

“ It’s gone up my leg and down my arm,” she told him, her nose tottering over her chin, where white hairs bristled with fright.

“ What was coming ? ” It was the look of a child who suffers pain for the first time, who asks “ Why ? ”—and is all absorbed in it, with no possible future.

“ Gradual stiffening of the joints,” said the doctor. “ Usual thing at her age. Going down the hill now.”

One dark hand trembled over her plate, her long, thin ear stretched towards Miss Alys, who flushed and hesitated—

Miss Felicia spoke first, drawling more than usual :
“ You can’t walk, that’s all ! The doctor says you must just keep quiet.”

Miss Alys and I had to shout this many times, smoothing it down with talk of spring and warm weather—but many words were always lost upon her. She heard painfully, and at last understood the first sentence.

Things in the room had grown dark, the draped mantelpiece was heavy with shadows, like a pall ; the brown walls had closed in on us. The dying light rested longest on the old woman’s face, that shone faintly yellow, with black pits and holes in it, and a fish-white gleam when her eyes turned uneasily. There was no help in the sky ; it was more desolate than the grey cloth and the coldly shining cups. The shadows under the saucers were not so deep as the hollow of age on her cheeks.

Her features seemed like a very old mask that some trouble behind was striving to break ; trembling contractions passed over it, her hands and arms and her thin neck shook, little swallowing, smacking sounds came from her throat. Then that dim, palsied soul suddenly remembered its old expression.

The face broke—tears, squeezed from some withered nerve, dropped on her cheeks, thin, cold tears that ran into the furrows round her mouth. “ Oh, I’m getting very old ! ” was all she could say to us.

* * * * *

I went to the beach ; the sea was far out, ebb-tide,

TWILIGHT

grey, merged in the sky ; the sands were a uniform pale mud colour, with stretches of dark seaweed. Desolate, flat, without light or life, only dusk stealing over them.

Then I understood that twilight ends in utter darkness before the stars rise.

XIII

THE BOX OF CHOCOLATES

THE two Miss Jellicoes still keep their Christmas presents till “the day”; everything that the postman brings is guessed at, examined, weighed in Miss Felicia’s hand, smelt carefully by Miss Alys, looked at, smiled at—and “put away.”

“Such a lot of little parcels,” they tell each other (they speak continually in that gay astonished voice grown-up people use when they have been much with children).

Christmas, 1916, brought them a long, square, flat, brown paper parcel. “It’s not a book——” said Miss Felicia. “A box of handkerchiefs——” guessed Miss Alys. “No——” said her sister, “it rattles!” They both put the parcel close to their ears, so that it had Miss Felicia’s rather lean, soft cheek at one moment on its string and then Miss Alys’ round, little face. Grey hairs from both their heads must have swept its stamps.

“What can it be?” they wondered.

The writing revealed a visitor who had boarded with them in the summer. “Put it by,” said Miss Alys, so it joined the pile in the breakfast-room.

“School” had broken up, but they were just as busy as when little girls of ten came to play upon

their wonderful high-backed piano ; Felicia was “altering” a hat (her grandfather’s top-hat in fact, “done up” with a rose), Alys was covering the crown of an old hat with green velvet.

Christmas Day came, with all that fearful awaking in the cold, bleak morning, dressing in the dark, hurrying to church : Miss Alys played the organ, Miss Felicia led the choir ; they made, besides, their own Communion, and then outside again had to linger here and there to say “A happy Christmas” to every one they knew. But at last the hour came when a smell of bacon says “breakfast,” when the firelight shines on the holly, and the presents can be guessed at for the last time, sorted out, strings cut, and with a delicious crackle the paper can be undone.

The flat square package was a box of chocolates.

The cover was so ornate that for quite five minutes they played over it like babies, making round eyes at each other and cooing their pleasure. There was a fair lady’s face in a setting of roses and forget-me-nots, and one butterfly about to settle while swallows flew fast away. A fine mauve ribbon was set across the corners. Miss Felicia untied it, Miss Alys cried “Oh ! oh !” Miss Felicia cried “What ?” Both faces were lit with joy by rows and rows of chocolates.

“Such beauties !” said Miss Alys. “So superior——” This, in a “superior” stage voice, from Miss Felicia ; each sweet was set in a little white frilled cup of its own, and some of the chocolates had crystallised violets on them and some had rose-pink petals ! It was the sort of box you don’t see every

day ! In fact, it was the last word in luxury. Miss Felicia was just going to eat one. . . .

"Do you think we ought to ?" sighed Miss Alys, "—in war time ?"

"But we didn't buy it!"

"—With Belgians starving."

"Oh, that's silly!"

"Let's keep it—"

That was a practical question ; good people like the Miss Jellicoes keep so many things, from their great-grandfather's clothes to all the ornamental almanacs that get sent in. Miss Felicia paused in the act of opening her mouth to bite and put the chocolate back.

"—Till we have visitors, you mean ?"

"Well, till the summer, you know, when we go to the cinema with Mrs. Bates."

"I know what," said Felicia decisively, "we'll keep it till we go to a theatre."

This was agreed to ; the box was shut (with regret), the ribbon tied again ; a theatre party would be twice as brilliant with this box of chocolates at it.

The two Miss Jellicoes finished looking at their presents briefly and quietly ; they had sobered themselves by an act of self-sacrifice and "economy."

They often thought about it in the weeks that followed ; they often talked about it when they were alone together, for a box like that was an event to people used to buying a pennyworth of "bull's-eyes." But they wouldn't break their resolution, it was a saving of money they would otherwise spend when their friends made up a theatre party.

Provincial companies came to the New Kursaal (at the town a mile away) in August ; and sure enough the hot weather ushered in the tourists, and then came the flaunting theatre bills : "Sweet Lavender." "We've seen that," thought Miss Felicia. "What's it the week after ?" "A Pair of Green Eyes." "Oh, that's splendid !"

The little party was arranged, the ladies walked across the fields in their best clothes (marvellous resurrections, very chaste and coy, with a bit of good old jewellery and a rose silk handkerchief pinned in a fold at the breast). Miss Alys bore the parcel ; she was full of gaiety, effervescing as magnesia and bright as the full moon, conscious with electric sympathy of the great riches she carried.

"No ! Don't you buy any sweets," she begged their friends when they reached the sweet stall in the "foyer."

"Please don't trouble to," pressed Miss Felicia quite easily. "We are providing the little refreshment this time. We've—ah—brought a box of chocolates !"

They took their seats ; this big second-class Kursaal, painted green with a grey roof and yellow flag, was very common, but it glittered inside at night. It was large, and novel, and full of people ; there were footlights, too, and an orchestra, and a velvet curtain, and "wicked-looking" girls in muslin aprons selling cigarettes. There were quantities of men, and some of them looked at the Miss Jellicoes ! The house was darkened ; a little sigh of bliss from Miss Alys accompanied the rising of the curtain.

"A play is a play," was their favourite criticism, spoken indulgently ; vulgar jokes, of course, were stupid, sad endings quite uncalled-for ; moments of rigid silence, while the heroine advanced on tip-toe with hands curled like claws and throat outstretched, were much applauded ; everything was clapped when the curtain fell. To enjoy the play was to enjoy themselves ; everything that helped the illusion of enjoyment was made use of, so at this moment, when the lights were switched on again and men began to smoke and other people crackled paper bags, Miss Alys crowned the moment by producing . . . the box of chocolates !

The Miss Jellicoës went up in their friends' estimation ; it was very handsome, very generous, to pay back the little theatre packets they had bought this way. Miss Alys was overflowing with good fellowship, Miss Felicia enjoyed the triumph by dropping her eyelids and glancing at the precious chocolates with an air of *de haut en bas*. The box passed along among their ten friends, each one helped herself, and at last, slowly, with happy hearts, the dear Miss Jellicoës took theirs.

A moment later a sick grimace transformed Felicia's face ; she glanced at Alys—Alys' lips were drawn, her round, dark, speckled eyes were fixed as though she was trying to lose herself in some mathematical conundrum ; their friends were very silent.

" . . . Did . . . did their sweets taste like mine ? " thought Felicia, horrified ; " have all the sweets gone bad ? . . . And I can't get rid of it ; I've got to swallow it ! It's as bitter as . . . ugh ! . . . gall

and vinegar ! rancid ! . . . ” The last lady in their row of friends coughed suddenly and choked.

Miss Alys beat her foot on the carpet ; it is hard to be humiliated !

(The Miss Jellicoes have often wondered since how soon their friends forgot the box of chocolates !)

XIV

SEPTEMBER IN THE FIELDS

SOMETIMES, walking through a meadow that one has crossed a hundred times before, one will suddenly realise "hedges," and "grass," for the first time.

On such a day in September I left the sea and strolled inland.

A new keenness in the wind made me breathe deep, though there was not a cloud in the sky and the sun burnt my face.

Blue downs stretched in the distance, hazy, unreal ; a vision seen by flat fields.

Berries were ripe, withered hawthorns flamed scarlet and crimson. It was that mingling of blue and red, gold on the straw ricks, yellow on the stubble, that made my heart glad with a sense of fulness.

Those bushes had a dusky bloom of defiance, hips and haws were brave, like a sunset in the morning.

I sat on the bank of a slow tidal river that cut my path ; mounds of grass in shadow were grey with dew, fields beyond—yellow with warmth and sunlight.

Spikes of dead grass, dried a light string colour, waved and bent a foot above the green ; purple brambles clung to low branches of the thorn trees,

cows in the field seemed to dream and doze like the sky.

One yellow leaf fluttered down . . .

The river, muddy-brown, held a reflection of sky on its ripples ; swallows and martins swooped over the water. A kingfisher came out from the shadows of a side-stream ; it seemed to wear on its wings the green of rushes, the blue of the sky ; for an instant it flashed gold and a glint of scarlet—then it was gone.

“The most perfect day in the year ! I must go blackberrying.”

With my baby sister I set out to gather something of the ripeness of the fields—but more to recapture my vision.

All the time we walked I wanted still to go farther, to push off the yellow haze on the stubble, to shake the hedges into flame.

Presently the joy of picking possessed us. Baby, with her pinafore caught on the brambles ; myself, astride a ditch, straining after the impossible one. The hedges were bound with convolvulus chains, white, trumpet-shaped flowers, that died as we plucked them ; gold leaves and stems and clusters of poisonous berries. There were hops, dried thistles, sloes, and blackberry blossom ; and sometimes a concealed ditch, choked with summer growth of weeds, bleached and withered, a matted tangle of dry sticks and grass.

The brambles above were thick with red, unripe berries, crisp and acid to the taste ; big purple ones clustered on the far side, pin-pricks of white light reflected on each round, black seed ; and a

strong autumn flavour of sun, and damp, and wine.

Village children scoured hedgerows in the distance, boys with school-bags and little girls with baskets and limp sun-bonnets to hold the blackberries in ; a scarlet hat hung on the neck of one.

Baby was very serious, absorbed in the joy of "hunting," anticipating, too, the pudding we were going to make.

The air was faintly sweet with a smell of clover, full of rustling from the stubble under our feet. I felt I might chase along the hedges for ever—I should never catch what I was seeking.

We lay on the landward side of the tamarisk, sorrel, and the last dandelions, the last meadow-sweet, high as a forest in front of our eyes. Through a break in the hedge I could see a line of blue water ; the sound of the sea, unhurried, unchanging, was like wind in a wood far away.

The earth stretched flat to the Downs, and the sky was flat—the sea. Peace had rolled over them. Thin, shining spider webs waved all across from spike to spike of withered blossom, a brown bee booming over the clover was an event.

The lark's song came to one through a veil of silence ; when a covey of partridges started up their rustling was caught and hushed by the grass.

Baby came to me, hot, tired, blackberry-stained ; all her little feeling for the hour expressed itself in blowing a silver thistle-ball, and lying with her head on my chest watching it sail up into the blue.

Idly we dipped our hands in the basket. The berries had a warm, wild grape flavour in the sun.

Baby talked about our pudding, then sucked clover petals and twined hops round her head. She asked me why "to-day" couldn't be always—with just this much blue and gold—and then she bit a sloe and I had to comfort her.

We sat up, a little breeze stirred and shook the feathery tamarisk.

"To-day will come again," I told her—but still longed to cease and hold that pleasant dream which lay on the fields—that something unnameable which had burnished the trees and touched all the stubble land, which had made that soft belt round the sky and caused my heart to leap.

"Oh, look ! They're gone !" cried Baby's shrill voice. The blackberry basket was empty.

"Never mind ! We've eaten them all ! There are lots more."

"But you'll never come again ! There'll be clouds to-morrow or somethin'—"

She was right—we didn't come, we couldn't recapture the spirit of that day, those sweet half-conscious moments lying in the grass, with the scent of wood smoke and the fluttering of a crimson leaf.

It is sweet to watch a flame while it burns.

XV

CAUSERIE

THE first butterfly, sulphur yellow, tossed like a leaf, sailing over a part of the country where there isn't a flower for miles. But there's a smell of cut grass from the growing wheat, there's a sound of waves from the wind in the trees.

I'm on the Sussex Downs, and it's the first spring day.

Bonniface (the fisherman descended from the Spanish Armada) says the clerk of the weather is "a woman for April, and she's wet-eyed." But she has glad eyes to-day. The sky was hyacinth-blue this morning. Now it's the colour of corn-flowers. This first heat has made ghosts of the trees ; those firs and cedars in the middle distance are fainting suddenly, their strength turned to smoke, their solid bark melting ; it is their dark blue souls we see ; the wood has turned to air.

It is the marriage of heat and moisture. The Downs are steaming, and a thousand cowslip plants, invisible yesterday, thrust up now a pinched little tuft of leaves. Here's a "lady-bird," and there's a bright green beetle, and the larks are singing.

Goodwood lies to the left, there's Molescombe behind, and high up in front a hill crowned with fir trees and beeches. I've walked ten miles. How

lovely to breast that hill and fling oneself on the grass. Apples and bread and cheese taste good up here. Hard miles tramped on the high road throb like music in the blood. Here on the hill-side out of the wind, in a natural clearing of gorse bushes, I shall lie down by the wild violets, with a mossy molehill for my pillow.

The little thorn tree watching over me is bare still, but the sun is full of promise ; it is ripening my face like a peony bud. Brown spiders run across my mackintosh and a perky little wren peeps at me. Except for the pheasant's calling there is silence, full and comforting, the silence of a great green world expanding, a sense of everlasting joyous energy.

Four o'clock ; on the way to West Dean through the beech woods. A rustle of red leaves under foot and a faint glowing tinge on the trees, beautiful against the hollies and the single cedars. Now a mile along a mossy ride, just space for two, and nut bushes each side and yellow catkin, and a king rook overhead.

Talk ! We touch on a thousand things. You see the forest, and I the Downs. You've hunted over this hill, you say (there are hoof marks in the moss) ; our footsteps are quiet as a cat's on velvet. The second butterfly ! A red admiral on the first white violets. Yes, we've picked them. They'll cheer us on the high road to the inn where we get tea—tea, that joy of the happy walker, in a cool, brown room at an oval table, home-made jam and cups and cups of tea ! This inn has its monstrous aspidistra—a plant nearly as indispensable to

respectability as a wedding ring. And now we've eight miles more.

The evening of the first hot day has a balm of its own ; long tree shadows bless the lanes, and when the red sun has set there comes a glow like the very essence of the celandine that has opened to-day by every stream and in the grass on every grave.

After a twenty-five mile tramp the last mile home finds us walking stiffly, but smiling like children at nothing at all, simply because life in us will look at life that way. This evensong of the birds is their way of expressing it ; who knows but that the glow in the sky is another way ?

Come out ! If all the hearts in the world would sit and give themselves to silence what potent men there'd be. We should have our sunsets then, our evensong, our swelled buds bursting to blossom, our tide of harmony—like the spring gale harping through the woods.

We should not be sterile then, or egoists, or lonely, but I should smile at you, and you at me.

XVI

RUST

THERE's a little old church near the Ouse ; it hath a most ancient smell !

"Forsaken of God and man," one thinks, looking in at its pink plaster, cracked and dried in plague spots. It is flagged with red tiles, and its pews are strong dark boxes with doors that can be bolted.

The vicar must be dead, and the people have taken and sold the cross.

And the text on its walls is : "I was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the House of the Lord."

Suddenly the bell clangs, and a fresh-faced man stands in the shadow of the belfry.

"I beg your pardon——"

"Not at all—week-day service." (The church is empty.)

"It's a small parish ? "

"Fifty souls."

"And scattered ? "

"Yes. Would you like to see the thickness of the tower walls ? In old days this tower was a beacon ;" he steps out into the sunlight to stare at it.

"I am very much attached to my church ; I intend to restore it."

Restore it ? There is a queer light in his eyes, pale blue in a burnt face, under his upstanding, fiery hair, with the quivering leaves all round it and the sunlight catching it till it flames like a halo.

"Of course, I shall keep the structure ! The churchwardens have gone into that with me."

"Is there much work here ?"

"Oh, I take outside work—I have to ; I've gone all through the Book of Isaiah with the Young Men's Christian Association, and I belong to the 'Society of the Letters of Israel'—to keep myself from rusting."

Rusting !

"You feel our present form of religion is not vital ?"

The vision fades from his eyes, they have almost a look of anguish ; his hands shut with the jerk of a man holding himself in with all his might ; he flushes painfully and says :

"I can't discuss that !" and goes in to hold his service by himself.

XVII

SMOKE IN THE GRASS

I DREAMED I was the eye that sees everything . . .

I opened on a grey morning over a vast space of drizzling mist that presently thinned till I saw the Downs. And from their surface—now at one point, now at another, up through the patches of withered grass, or from the young grass—came little spires of bluish smoke that puzzled me . . . Shepherds burning the gorse? But the shepherd walked quietly, no smoke near him, nor from the sheep, nor from the beech trees . . . Burnt matches? Two or three puffs of blue smoke hovered together just under me. Matches don't move, but these moved forward, leaving a faint tinge in the air—as you may see autumn winds trail the smoke of burning leaves on a wet day. They paused on the rim of the Downs, and there above an old wood thickened and swelled into a column that topped the trees.

"What is it?" I asked. One answered: "Smoke from a girl's heart."

And at first, very faint, as it might be the shouting of midget flies, a tinkle of talk rose to me through the smoke. One question asked ceaselessly: "The *meaning* of it all?" Tiny voices uttering the words, "Art," "Duty," "Conscience," "Freedom,"

. . . And all at once I saw it blacken and grow violent : " Religion ! "

I longed to be a great hoof that I might stamp on the fire—surely the grass was burning ? It was dangerous for the shepherd ; the old sheep, I felt, would be choked. Yet now, wherever I looked, this smoke of women's hearts ! Religion ! . . . I longed to scream . . . with the grass so dry they would set fire to the world !

It did not matter that some smoked blue like wood-fire, and some whitish-grey, and others black ; in all a spark was burning.

And a memory came back to me. Once, when I had seen two bonfires lit under aspen trees, poor aspens that had suffered from the long, dry summer. (Their leaves were quivering, they fell in little showers round the fire as if its acrid smoke had cut their stems.) And the gardener was smiling, he said it was a good year for bonfires, so much dead wood . . .

One heap blazed and crackled.

" 'Tis the dry leaves," the gardener told me ; " old leaves burn first ; 'tis the rakin's o' th' front garden. Now *that* heap's all green, watch 'um ! " A much bigger heap, full of nettles and summer dock, no fire visible, but clouds of bluish smoke. I wanted to stir it with my spade.

" Leave 'um be," said the gardener. " Wait ! " The smell of that green bonfire filled every nook of the garden. At eight o'clock a message reached me—I stole out. Down the garden came a great soft roaring like the sound of a huge bellows ; I was frightened ; the gardener took my hand.

"I've stirred 'um up," he whispered, "look——"

The green weeds had blackened, twisted, snapped, the cut grass and cabbage stalks had fallen in, a great hole showed like the top of a burning mountain and clouds of flame rolled out, dyeing the trees crimson.

"It'll burn till mornin'," the gardener told me. But I felt certain it would burn for ever . . . it would catch the sky on fire, and all the stars would drop like the shrivelled aspen leaves.

I went to bed very solemn, expecting death.

And I remember the sweet feeling of the rain next morning, and how the garden glistened and seemed all alive again, taking long breaths, and swelling out the half-dead flowers and bushes.

"It burnt up the dry weather!" I told my dolls, and running out found one pale spire of smoke still rising from the ashes . . .

Smoke?

The grass was surely burning . . . But my great eyelid drooped. I woke. Two middle-aged girls sitting near me were speaking in low voices of "Art," "Freedom" . . . "Religion!"

XVIII

WAVES

I LAY under the low, yellow cliff, on a bank of shingle facing the sea.

It was October. All night a new unfriendly gale had rattled our windows ; in the morning, trees looked harassed and leaves, speckled, as though they had the plague, whirled distractedly at street corners.

The sea had a far, wide look ; brown and grey shadows lay across it from the wave's edge to the horizon.

One had seen the tide slip in and out, gently running up and down the sand all through September, but suddenly I made the discovery that the body of the sea moved. There was a thin, silver flash on the far edge, a line of indigo, that rose up into a dazzle of light with each fresh wave ; the whole energy of that mass of water was drawn up into a long wall that curved, and brimmed, and rolled over flat wastes of foam ; that was pushed on irresistibly.

When it broke in thunder my heart leaped. Happy the sun sparkles that can play like reflections of a white furnace upon it.

I watched lather like soapsuds dashed on to dead-looking seaweed banks, that came to life in the

contact, with wet brown shadows and blowing ribbons of amber. One felt that disease must perish if all the sick could be laid at the edge of the waves, with this salt, fresh gale in their faces.

Baby was with me, her little red cloak peaked like a hobgoblin's. With quite fearless, unspeculative eyes she looked at the water, her attention absorbed in finding "mermaids' purses."

She felt, without thinking, that the sea had its bounds ; and the angry colour that to me was indicative of its spirit was sand stirred up and lights from the storm clouds. The waves were "white horses," and the fact of the great sea, fresh and thundering for ever, lay in her quiet child's balance as something infinitely less than herself. So she stooped with her back to it—searching for "mermaids' purses" in the seaweed.

But the wonder of the waves had gone over me, the force of attraction which drew them to rise out of the level sea and shatter themselves on stones ; which caused that little after-ripple and compelled the next wave.

The edge of the sea was black with weed that floated on the oily swell stretching between and was thrown up dark and heavy in the foam.

From far out one could watch the seventh wave, undulating along the top of the water, growing, rising, a line of darkness towering to a thin edge ; then it sweeps the shadows before it, rolls, as though it were the depth of the sea risen up to the clouds.

One held one's breath ; suddenly hollowed and curving with yellow sunlight through its arching crest, unspeakable blackness in its trough ; it

topples forward, pulled by the force that had drawn it up—breaking, a foaming waterfall, thunder, wild horses plunging, and its wet reflection in the sea before it. A white waste of driven foam boiling over the black weed. Silence, but for its death-sigh effervescent into fresh life on the wind. And then the long wash back, with the rolling stones—to the sea.

XIX

ADVERSITY

IT was Sunday afternoon ; a little woman with fair, untidy hair crawled upstairs to make her bed ; her name was Mrs. Pott. She had cooked and served and washed up the dinner, the children had gone out to get "May-marigolds," baby was with his father—he could stop there !

The bedroom faced south and had been drenched by the sun since nine o'clock ; the yellow light poured in through dusty glass on warm, tumbled bedding (Mr. Pott had not been up long), on the eiderdown, once pink, now dingy grey, lying on the floor, on a pair of torn pyjamas and a pile of dirty clothes in the corner where they had been left since Saturday night. Stockings, all holes, drooped over a chair back—they had been there a month ; the dressing-table looked as if two cats had fought on it.

Little Mrs. Pott touched the yellow mattress, then sat upon it. She had lifted it, turned it, banged it about for so many years, but lately—well, it didn't seem worth thinking about. She would have to do it presently ; meantime, to sit and think of nothing was the easiest thing to do, to lie down on the unmade bed instead of making it and instead of dressing and washing as she had intended,

to forget—above all to forget. To forget even that there was anything to be forgotten. Eva Pott shut her eyes. She had small light blue eyes that had been full of gaiety, with lines at the corners that meant sweetness ; now they were pale and wandering ; to shut them meant to stave off all effort for another minute, to be in the dark, nothing, nobody, a thing that didn't matter. . . The baby crying suddenly in the room below made her pass her tongue on her lips and swallow. "I ought to go down," she thought, but didn't go.

Somebody opened the small iron gate, the front door bell rang, once, twice ; Mrs. Pott stirred. "Bother!" she whispered, then she heard her husband's footsteps.

"Chum," he was calling at the foot of the stairs.
"Mrs. Summer to see you."

Mrs. Summer was an acquaintance who had been away for three years. Mrs. Pott lifted her head. Yes, the visitor was below in the drawing-room. Should she go down ? She supposed so. Slowly she dragged off the bedjacket she had worn, but felt too tired to care if she went down with a bodice on or not ; the easiest thing was to put on her blue cloth costume that buttoned down the front, it should have a thin shirt under it to show white neck and sleeves—her own scraggy little bit of neck must show instead to-day, and her reddened, roughened arms. If she touched her hair she knew it would come down. Instead of washing she passed her two hands over her face as a man might do in prison.

She had only been five minutes sitting chatting

in the drawing-room when she felt a strange chill in the air, the talk flagged, the spirit of intimacy was gone, they appeared like strangers examining each other on a railway journey, and it was this examination that made the strange, cold vacuum. Mrs. Pott followed her visitor's eye from one shabby article to another, from yesterday's crumbs on the carpet to her husband across the room ; she saw his stout brick-red face spread like a dying poppy, unhealthy, repulsive, with a would-be ingratiating smile upon it, and a queer liquid light in his green eyes. She saw the pot-shaped fez he had worn for years and years, to cover his bald head since that sunstroke in the East ; it had grown greasy, the rim was black, the tassel a mere scarecrow. She saw his baggy trousers the colour of dry lichen ; she saw herself, untidy, disreputable, poverty-stricken, and at that moment her baby toddled in ; he had been playing in the dustbin.

"I did wash him this morning——" she cried suddenly, as though answering an unspoken charge.

"Good-bye," murmured the visitor, and left.

Mrs. Pott sat still in her little grey-green drawing-room, where the chairs were so dusty, and memory stirred in her ; the same room, the same people—three years ago, but as different as withered primroses from the clean, growing flowers.

It had been her home then, something worth fighting for, with a future, too—the children's prospects ; and the hard work done so gaily to keep it going on her husband's Government pension. A time when she had washed and ironed rather than look untidy, when friends came to tea and

went away and said : " Such a nice, bright, brave little woman, Mrs. Pott." Brave ? She had fought—if that was bravery.

At the beginning of the war when her husband had been refused she had cautioned him, she had begged him to give up drinking . . . " Only a drop, what's that ? " he had said. He never got drunk, he took " a drop at night," as he had done " out there " during those years of lonely " duty " in his youth. " We can't afford it, now," she had told him. When it came to paying the children's school bills in the second year of war she had stood up to him : in that very room one night she had faced him like a tiger, and he had smiled that fat, repulsive smile of his, and told her that the money was his, that she—Eva Pott—was his wife, and if she bothered him . . . The children had to go to the board school then ; they grew loud and dirty, and out of hand. Prices increased . . . there came days when she hadn't enough. Days when she looked fiercely at the sun and blackly at her neighbours, when she banged doors and went shopping at cheap places, late, with the crowd, trudging like the poorest, carrying the last baby (that so often " breaks a woman," as people say), slipping in by the back door, but still curling her hair when she went to bed, fighting the last solitary, bitter fight of pride against adversity. And then her woman's pride—the lynch-pin of small houses—had given way.

Friends had turned from her, it seemed ; no one had troubled to look behind that proud, strained attitude she had adopted when she felt herself

slipping . . . and if nobody cared she didn't care either! What a heavenly relief that first defiant "Don't care" had been. Recklessness was like new courage. And then had come a gradual dulness, inertia of the soul, a genuine carelessness. Minute to minute lived with as little thought as possible, and as little effort, and no future at all.

Her husband sat in the sun, or went fishing, or knocked in nails with a rusty hammer ; he smiled, he drank . . . and food grew dearer.

Now ?

She heard sounds that meant the children had come in. "Oh, baby!" they were shouting. "Baby's in the coal box! Look!" She must get tea, tread upon coal-dust and marigolds mixed, and all at once a douche of tears came. "I *can't* go on!" she sobbed—but she got up . . .

XX

THE SHEPHERD

CLEAR day in autumn, no wind, the Downs pure gold.

An hour when the sun-warmed grass becomes amorous, each blade quivers with joy.

The flocks browse about round the gorse bushes, a continual “clink-clank, clink-clank” from the moving sheep-bells.

And there, in the sun, sits the shepherd.

A thin, weather-stained man, little bright eyes and a long hooked nose ; a pastoral figure, in his high-crowned, wide-brimmed hat, with his wide smile and red cheekbones.

These bearded shepherds are picturesque ; there's a wild humour in their eyes ; sun, wind, rain have soaked into them, and solitude. When they smile it is the very sweetness of the Downs.

A grey, curly sheep dog gambols round him, nine months old, wonderfully steady for a puppy ; the man himself leaning on his elbow, his coat wide open, is fashioning something with a knife.

Words come slow and strange to his tongue, but musically.

“ That's my village, by that little nap o' ground yonder, where th' cloud's travellin' ; that's where I fold the sheep of a night in the wattles.”

Out all day, sunrise to sunset, and he walks home with the stars.

What is he doing ? He holds up a little square of moleskin ; he has eighty of them to make himself a fancy waistcoat. And he sings while he works.

Is his son a shepherd ? His son is in China. " Make more money, and time off. It comes hard on a shepherd, he gets no Sunday."

" What about Bank Holiday, Christmas ? "

" Never had a day off in me life ; if we gets home in time for dinner Christmas Day we're lucky."

" But the farmer gives you a sheep now and then ? "

" Devil a bit ! They're all numbered ; I have to account for every one. But my master lets me live rent free—that's the thing shepherdin', they'll give you a hovel on the Downs. Thirteen shillin' a week and a family of ten ; 'tis better paid now, the young men 'as a pound, some of them ; shepherds was gettin' scarce ! "

And then he tells of that dreadful day in eighty-one, when " th' east wind blew on the snow, and the sheep froze stiff, an' the Downs were hard, like ice. Great drifts thirty feet deep blowed over the edges an' froze there . . . "

" It must be lonely for the young wife when you first come shepherding ? "

He waits a minute before answering that . . .

" Well," he says, " my wife pretty near died the first year. We was livin' by ourselves in a hut on a hill they call ' America,' because 'tis so far from everywhere. Just half-a-dozen fir trees, an'

the gorse, an' cowslips ; rare beautiful by moon-light.

" I had me father's old accordion ; we would sing in the doorway. But my wife turned quiet of a sudden ; she got pale an' nervous—'twas her 'time' comin' on her for the first time."

" 'What'll I do ? ' she kep' askin'. I was only a lad. ' 'Tis human nature,' was what I told her. But she lost her sleep, lyin' thinkin' of it in the dark.

" ' We'll get mother up, an' it'll be all right,' I'd say.

" ' And who's to fetch her, then, when I'm alone ? '

" ' You mind your cookin' ; how d'ye s'pose th' other shepherds' wives 'as managed ? '

" But you might talk to the wind as well as reason with a woman.

" ' There's plenty o' time,' I'd laugh. An' she'd look at me ; do you know I'd wake of a night, sometimes, an' see they dark looks !

" ' What are you so squered of ? ' I'd ask——

" But it wasn't no good to argue with 'er, she'd got it fixed in her 'ead she'd be alone.

" There ! Women's that silly."

" Well, what happened ? "

The shepherd laughs suddenly : " Why ! Now I come to think of it—she *was* alone ! A month afore her time, too, one day when I'd gone up over with the flocks, an' the shepherd's wife down yonder 'ad gone to market. 'Twas autumn, I mind me, a day like this, only the dawn broke dark——" (pointing at the sun).

" She was settin' the same place as she is to-night,

coloured beautiful, like blood ; an' then a fog come up. 'Tis dark as Egypt in our huts these autumn nights—”

“ And the child ? ”

“ Dead, miss ; she overlaid it. Well, well, I've 'ad ten since then. Good-night, miss.”

XXI

RENDEZVOUS

THERE'S a lovers' path on the side of the Downs, bordered with trees. A solitary place, near woods, more quiet than lonely.

The grass grows long each side, where the beeches stand four deep ; rooks fly over at sunset, and the leaves burn ; in spring it is full of flowers.

Going there at twilight to catch the moonrise, it was close and dark, muffled in a web of dew ; there was no wind. I left the path—it was more silent walking on the grass—and my footsteps roused a fragrance that hung round me under the trees. How soft and slim their boughs look by twilight, how living !

One startled cry from a bird—then I crawled under a hawthorn and lay down to wait.

Sometimes a drop fell from a leaf on my face, then the next tree would faintly move. These trees moving on a separate impulse, and not one breath of wind, made the twilight mysterious.

Far out, under the tip of the lowest branch, a pale light began to grow.

A little sound fled along the leaves. "How many lovers," I thought, "have kissed each other here ?" And I kissed the hawthorn. The same bird cried again—another girl was coming up the path.

She kept stopping, and advancing in little timid starts, looking round at the trees. I could hear her breathing.

She stood on a level with my hawthorn and began to listen. I could just make out her face peering at me, staring at the silver light beyond.

She had dark hair, her skirt seemed ragged ; her footsteps stirred the grass as mine had done ; did she smell that fragrance ? She put her hand to her breast.

There is a scent like the memory of violets in the woods these autumn nights.

“A rendezvous ?” I wondered.

And slowly the light grew, and the trees craned over it, looking black and fantastic. And fear seemed to fall on the girl ; she stood fascinated, afraid to tread, even her breathing stopped. All the little wood was still.

And suddenly the moon rose. It startled us ; pure silver, a magic ring that made the Downs look black as pitch. It was beautiful, strange and wild —that little sigh that the trees gave, this scent of the flowers where there was only wet, dead leaves. Then, quite distinctly, close to us on the empty path—footsteps. No shape of man, but the muffled “thud-thud” of a boot striking the moss. Not a soul but ourselves ; I felt my hair stiffen ! The girl gave one terrified shriek and vanished. I heard her crash through the trees and her footsteps die away towards the village.

Then I crept out—

. . . It was a toad !

XXII

A CORNER STONE

SINCE the servant trouble, a little, thin, pale slip of a woman comes to our house and hurries about all day like an ant ; no one thinks of her, we take her for granted ; it seems that she arrives by the back door at a certain hour—one has seen her taking off a hat—and just as regularly she slips away.

Where she goes, what she does afterwards, whether she still goes on running round and round, silent as a shadow, quiet as a mouse, always bending over floor, or stove, or dresser—no one knows.

Our silver is bright, our sideboard polished. Her name is Mrs. Moon ; one remembers vaguely a mop of tow-coloured hair that falls over her face while on her knees scrubbing, a frightened little laugh like the drumming of a snipe . . . but hers is a presence never realised until its absence.

One morning no dressing bell rings ; the blinds are still drawn in the hall at nine o'clock. People go about with cross, astonished looks ; there is dust on the sideboard ; clocks stop, conscious of the dislocation. Mrs. Moon has not come !

Right away from the residential neighbourhood I found a sandy lane that led me to a hill-side, where an old settlement of cottages seemed to sleep in their gardens.

One-storied, set round with fruit trees, golden vegetable marrow flowers climbing out of the hedges, purple asters, tall, blood-red dahlias, pickling cabbages, plum trees, the ripe fruit falling on some wind-torn, crumbling roof.

And children ! Rolling in the sand, fallen in ditch, muddy all over, in rags for clothes, with eyes like wild brown berries.

Ours is a tidy, orderly parish ; I felt as if I had stolen in through some secret bramble-covered door and found Arcadia. A huge woman with a flushed, full-blown face raised herself from stooping over the garden and stared at me with her arms akimbo. She had black hair and eyes like little black devils ; when I asked my way she answered surlily :

“ Down, an’ round, an’ up.” Then went in, banging the door.

I passed through a sort of rabbit burrow of blue willow trees, up wooded steps as steep as my chin —on the farthest point, under a solitary, stunted, lightning-struck pine tree, stood the most storm-blown cottage of them all.

Here I found Mrs. Moon, peeling potatoes. She bobbed a curtsey and the fringe of tow-coloured hair fell over her eyes ; she said, “ Beg pardon ”—she smiled—I thought of a watery moon in its last quarter, quickly extinct in clouds.

There were children playing on the doorstep, but their shaven heads were yellow as the sand.

“ . . . I keeps to myself,” she said, when I asked about her neighbours. “ Mostly they don’t bear association with . . . ”

I could picture Mrs. Moon, with her superior

Saxon spirit, coming and going among them silently, respectable, slow of feeling, a corner stone of the social fabric.

Grey sky seemed to sweep her little slate roof ; we went inside. Sitting in the front room I heard the fire burn with heavy, crackling noises in an old stove ; wind driving in at the door shook the tablecloth ; the wet leaves on the fruit trees rustled one on the other, a vague sound, as of flowers that fall. A pair of bellows hung by the stove, where a teapot was stewing ; on a shelf above stood a smiling china dog and a shepherdess.

Everything was scrupulously clean.

A little dark room, with the noise of a hundred flies knocking themselves against the low ceiling.

Outside, on a bench under an apple tree, a little boy with a dirty face and steadfast eyes was munching green fruit ; there was a saucepan beside him and a zinc basin with the apple boughs sweeping down over it.

Country sounds . . . an old hen scratching in the garden, a woman's sharp voice : "Edie, you let that be !" Falling leaves, and at the door sweetbriar, with the dewdrops hanging white on it.

These cottages were "freehold," Mrs. Moon told me ; the black-haired people—"out-hangers"—gypsies who had settled there fifty years ago. "Mrs. Pharo, with ten children ; Mrs. Tuck, with nine, and Mrs. Faithful—all as dirty as could be, an' not knowing whose was which ! "

Pointing at the little boy who was munching apples, I asked : "Is he your child ? "

"Beg pardon ? "

"Is that your child?"

"Oh, no, miss—my brother's."

"Where are yours?"

"Beg pardon?"

"Have you none?"

"I'm not married, miss."

"... Then why do we call you 'Mrs.' Moon?"

(To which, Mrs. Moon, patient to the end :)

"Because the last one you 'ad was 'Mrs.' Laurence . . .'"

Birds twittered; looking out at the low eaves I asked:

"Do swallows build here?"

"Swallers? I dunno as I rightly knows a swaller when I sees one; swallers an' sparrers, them's all the same to me—not but what one don't like hearin' 'em . . ."

I tried to find out what the little gypsy girls did all day, having passed one with hair like a raven's wing. She "Didn't know"; speculation brought a startled look to her eyes; at last I drew from her:

"They goes along the brambles, gettin' tender shoots for the goats."

Mrs. Moon's half-witted sister laughed in the garden, a strong, rosy girl, "simple," as the saying is.

"That's a nice cat of yours," I said (it had mewed at the sound).

"Is it a Persian?"

"Us calls 'un a tom-cat."

Silence again; Mrs. Moon smiling, her eyes furtively slipping from mine, her short, red hands always twisting and twisting her apron.

I sighed.

The little kitchen had no voice but its grandfather clock that ticked very slowly ; and this woman who worked like a machine was silent, too, dumb as the stone under our houses.

I said goodbye to her ; the clouds had passed ; my bramble-covered lane flashed wet in the sunlight. Up on the hill-top a party of little Moons were playing cricket with a stone and the lid of a box.

There were blackberries here, clusters of them under the dead gold leaves, warm in the sun, with a full, soft flavour of grapes and mulberries ; no one picked them, but flocks of children came when they were hungry and fed on them improvidently, like the birds ; only one little boy filled his schoolbag, and he had yellow hair.

I went to our district visitors.

“Mrs. Moon ? Oh, yes, very respectable, kept house for her old father, a farm labourer of the bronzed, carved type, who sat at home all Sunday and stared at the fire—would not move an eyebrow if the roof fell in ! Seventy-five, never missed a day’s work ! And her brother—superior, modern young man, who read the newspaper, and made her get up at five every morning of her life to give him breakfast.”

“Circumstances ? . . . Yes, a struggle, no doubt. . . . Character ? Had she any ? ” . . .

I asked about her neighbours, my eyes still full of the fluttering of butterflies, the bloom of apples and plums. But all they could tell me was just the truth.

“Lazy ! Dirty ! Dishonest ! . . . Intermarrying

until half the children were lunatics! . . . Not very immaculate! . . . ” And that closed the conversation.

But that evening at dusk I pictured all the sleepy little Moons, and Pharos, and Faithfuls, coming in from the hedges to scramble about their mothers’ tables; and I thought—that Mrs. Moon would wash her brother’s children’s faces—and that Mrs. Pharo wouldn’t!

XXIII

A BENEFACTRESS

MISS GRIFFIN likes to do things for people, but those for whom she does most are the most silent about her. She is well off, economical, ugly, and fond of display if it can be had for nothing. Her chief indulgence is the pleasure of being generous. But afterwards—"There's no gratitude," she says.

Miss Griffin goes for her holiday to a cottage where a married servant lives. You see, it's cheap, and good for the servant.

"How's every one?" is Miss Griffin's greeting, followed by rapid action of her sharp, black eyes, a "company" smile, and a tilt of the head.

She makes a picture in the cottage doorway, the sunset stains her yellow face and for a moment blinds her eyes. She is very happy. "Alice," the fat married girl, is smiling; Miss Griffin feels generous. That table spread with every sort of mat, and plate, and dish, and flower is a welcome, surely? A sign of popularity? (Or is it just an independent effort to pay off a debt!?)

Miss Griffin has her time of honey, her lips expand and all the while a look of greed fills her eyes; they hunt about the room like birds of prey.

"Alice!" she calls, "now, how's the apple tree?" (The tree she "gave" them years ago.)

"The dew is fallin', miss," says Alice; but the dew's all waved aside; it is sweet to be a giver! and as Miss Griffin is alive and active in her sense of good things done, there follows now an expedition to the garden. At sight of the tree Miss Griffin is so touched that she recites its history and tells what she, Alice, ought to "make" by it; giving it again with added value.

"And how's your husband doing?"

"Nicely, thank you, miss."

"And Francie?"

"Very well."

"And little Henry?" This is all another benefaction, remembering "these people's" names.

Miss Griffin exclaims suddenly: "And how's that nasty feeling your husband had last spring? Better? Never mind, I'm going to give him something for it. An excellent tonic, I take it myself. My dear girl, don't thank me! I'll order five bottles at once." (She orders two eventually, and they go down the sink.)

"Did the skirt I gave you come in useful?" she asks.

And soon Alice looks unhappy. She has been making heavy, sticky efforts at thanks for hours, it seems; thanksgiving has died.

But in the cottage bedroom, that first evening, Miss Griffin is gay as a bird. She doesn't mind the shiny text or the tuft of paper roses—she has discovered again that the "simple life" can be a means of untold pleasure.

"They're grateful!" is her last thought, smiling.

Miss Griffin loves to talk, she'll give away whole reams of words so fast that you can hardly follow them; and after breakfast she holds Alice back to tell her how "wet" she got last time she went "flag-selling for the hospitals."

"There now!" says Alice.

"Oh, I didn't mind that—" A pause, and Alice :

"'Ow good you are!"

"Oh, duty! duty!" smiles Miss Griffin, but below the smile some wormy doubt begins to crawl. A little plaintively she tells a splendid story of privation in the town, and how she helped, alone, of course, going round collecting, giving away old clothes, investigating causes . . . and in the end the malcontents were "rotters."

Miss Griffin sees the morning sun across her apple tree next day and is off at once to find the workman husband; but it is she, the giver, who talks. She takes the stage and the workman registers a grudge against the tree for ever.

Miss Griffin hears him sawing up her firewood—and seeing wet logs in a plantation another way of being endeared presents itself; she carries home a basket full, her black eyes beaming, and, oh! the joy of seeing those logs burn.

"I'll fetch some every day!" she cries. But once the usual wood is not put down for her, and the little gift is counted on, this adventure loses life.

"I simply *can't!*" she says, quite vexed. "I've strained my side; you've no idea the weight! feel *that!*"

The warmest moments of the holiday are by the evening fire with Alice (invited in, another benediction). Miss Griffin gives away her life in volumes then, torrents of little hard dry words poured down on Alice. All she has seen and done, the beggar she met and "helped," the police case she investigated, the boy who coughed and whom she dosed with eucalyptus, the little girl she rescued from a dog.

"You're always doin' things," says Alice dully. And by the end of the holidays ? Miss Griffin looks tired again, her soul is sour, her eyes are sharper than ever. She tells herself : "They're all the same ! No gratitude !"

XXIV

ARBOR VITÆ

THE Blundell-Napiers live in a big, solid, red house, stowed away behind tidy flower beds, down a long drive bordered by arbor vitæ fir trees.

An indispensable tree ; tidy, pointed, aspiring round its own centre like a pinnacle of virtue ; ever green and smelling very wholesomely of turpentine. A fine specimen one grows on the front lawn ; it has darkened the drawing-room windows and impoverished the soil ; young trees trying to push up in its shadow have starved and died—

The Blundell-Napier girls sit under it this afternoon watching a set of tennis ; they play in turns.

Elizabeth, the eldest, is tall, and pale, and thin, with a pinched-looking nose ; Millicent, the second, is thin, and pale, and tall ! Her lips are colourless, her rather full eyes paler than Elizabeth's ; Angela, playing tennis, is pale and thin ; she is the prettiest, but her hair is only the shadow of gold, with a promise of gleam in it that never comes ; her eyes, perfectly innocent, are unspeculative as the petals of some faint blue flower, and her mouth, meant to pout like a rosy apple blossom bud, has no energy in its curve, it falls half open.

The youngest girl, in a very short skirt, dangles a racket between her knees ; she is still in the schoolroom and growing too fast. She has Angela's mouth, and Elizabeth's nose, and Millicent's eyes, but her own spirit comes out in the freckles on her brow and the way she shakes her hair back.

Her father is secretly more fond of her than of the others ; he has never analysed the feeling, but somehow—he looks at her with relief.

Elizabeth is an excellent girl ; Millicent—except for one wild fit when she took to water-colour painting, has never murmured ; Angela has only been delicate, and yet . . . Margot claps her hands and shouts “ Played ! ” to a good stroke.

Their dear old friend, Colonel Fanshawe, has come in to make up a set with a young friend who is being put up for several days in the Blundell-Napier's house—(a good-looking boy, with prospects).

Talk under the arbor vitæ tree is low and toneless ; it is very hot, Angela has served into the net four times running ; there comes an authoritative voice from an upstairs window, toning its way through the heavy shade of the tree :

“ Angela ! You are not paying attention ! ”

The others stop talking as though guilty ; only Angela, for the first time in her life, answers back : “ That won't make me play any better ! ” And her pale cheek colours a little ; she is playing opposite to the young man.

Tea is brought out, but no one moves to lift the silver tea-pot ; instead, they look towards the house. Then Elizabeth, who is twenty-seven, gets up to

be in readiness to hand the tea-cups. Their mother is coming.

Colonel Fanshawe, speaking of the Blundell-Napiers, always calls them "The salt of the earth." . . . Certainly, if salt has the stiff qualities of virtue in it, then Mrs. Blundell-Napier is very salt.

When she takes up her position under the trees, surrounded by her daughters, she looks like substance among shadows.

Her full, prominent, blue eyes have an inquisitive stare, as though asking :

"What road do you travel ?" They get a hard light like polished steel if she suspects it of being other than her own. So had she looked at every circumstance threatening her children. Every new thought, every alien fancy—and fancies had died—

Her grey hair, that still has a faint inclination to wave like Angela's, is parted severely ; there is a warm glow on her wind-nipped, withered cheeks ; they hang loosely, but visibly swell if she is outraged.

There is a certain placid sweetness about her smile, for all the set line of her lips ; tiny crow's-feet wrinkles cling to the corners of her eyes ; but just as virtue in her, stronger than the woman, has triumphed—so the hard light of her "principles" has crushed those wrinkles into insignificance.

She lifts the tea-pot now, Elizabeth takes the cups, Millicent the bread and butter, Angela the sugar basin.

The young man feels silenced by this show of discipline, but Colonel Fanshawe, who is used to it, only thinks : "Good girls, the Blundell-

Napiers——” and then, almost wistfully: “. . . Somebody ought to do something for them . . .” He registers a vow to take Angela for a drive in his pony trap.

Margot has been dreaming for a minute, her long, pale face lifted to some sound in the trees; her mother’s round eyes look askance at her. It has hardly been realised that Margot is old enough to do things—she has taken advantage of them, somehow, and secretly grown up while Elizabeth was still being scolded; she is sweeter than the others.

“Have you had good sets?”

“Too hot to play!”

“Millicent must look for the ball she lost——”

“The light is going! Mustn’t waste time!
Margot’s turn to play next——”

Their usual tea-time tennis conversation.

“Have you played much?” asks the young man of Angela.

“Mother says we ought to play!” she answers simply.

“Don’t you care for it?”

She looks at him wonderingly; it has never occurred to them to put that question.

“Have you lived here long?” He is looking at her hair; the sun steals round the branches of the arbor vitæ tree and lays a pale beam on it.

“Yes, always. Mother . . .”

“Elizabeth! You’re not to speak like that!”

Angela stops speaking with her mouth half open, the young man shuffles his feet, discomfited; Elizabeth, who has said rather snappily that she is sure it won’t rain, looks down; her eyes, like her

father's, deep-set and rather hopeless, especially when she smiles, darken with a gleam of her mother in them now ; that, and her close shut lips—then the little flash passes.

Mrs. Blundell-Napier talks on serenely to the colonel ; the last word on any subject is said by her . . . politics, the local bazaar, the question of Margot being sent to school, the question of weather for the harvest festival ; her tone carries the authority of one who considers, selects, and arranges a number of people's lives with perfect confidence ; and her hands, folded now on her knees, are capable ones, although a little swollen.

There is a lost ball in the meadow ; Angela and the young man go to look for it together. They went somehow in silence, almost as if they slipped away. He had stolen a secret look at her, and caught a new, startled shyness that made trouble in her eyes ; the petals of the flower had stirred. It made him forget her brown alpaca skirt, her plain silk blouse, and her brown tie (her mother's touch). Shadows deepen under the tree, long gleams of evening sunlight chase away, slanting over the lawn ; the sunlight went with Angela through the meadow grass, to warm her pale hand, touching his for an instant in their search for the ball.

A dressing bell rings ; Mrs. Blundell-Napier fetches some fruit for the colonel's wife ; they go towards the house.

Inside, there is the dining-room where Elizabeth works a sewing machine all the morning, a dark room, severely useful, with no pictures on the walls,

only four old prints, grandfathers and grandmothers of the Blundell-Napiers. There is the pantry, where Angela does the lamps, and the old school-room, where Millicent is sent to do her painting every morning at eleven.

The drawing-room, like the dining-room, has a dark grey wallpaper, the furniture is equally good, some inherited, some bought expensively ; but in spite of the coloured Indian rug the room does not cheer you, it has too much an air of four walls and chairs.

As Mrs. Blundell-Napier has eliminated the personal from her furniture, so with her dress ; it is always correct, but subordinate, for—meeting the hard light in her prominent boiled-gooseberry eyes—who would see her hat ?

Dinner is a careful, silent meal ; there is always a feeling that one shouldn't talk about anything but the weather in front of servants.

The youth won't smoke to-night, he follows them at once to the drawing-room ; it is his last evening ; he sits close to Angela by the open window.

“ Girls, get your thimbles ! . . .”

Elizabeth bends over her needlework, a brush and comb bag for an art competition in *The Gentlewoman*, Millicent, like a pale, attenuated grasshopper, crouches over a frame of church embroidery ; Angela resumes the tie she is knitting. Mrs. Blundell-Napier, sitting in the midst of them, turns up the lamp with a pleased smile. She has done her duty, she has brought up her daughters to make excellent wives ; no one could put a patch in better than Elizabeth.

But the lamp that shines on her warm russet cheeks shows the pallor of her daughters' faces, white with some sickly anaemia of the spirit. Is it the fault of her too vigorous personality that they have grown up in shadow? Have her roots starved them?

Angela drops her knitting needle and about twelve stitches; she says "Bother!" very softly. . . . "That's mild!" laughs the youth, close to her ear; she glances round.

"When we were little, if we used strong language, mother used to have our mouths scrubbed out with a piece of soapy flannel—"

He looks at their loose, pale lips, and wonders that they ever spoke again.

There is still a long streak of crimson in the west; a faint, damp scent comes up from the grass.

"It looks jolly out there—cool!" he whispers—she, too, stares at the garden; trees she has known all her life have a different look to-night, they seem heavy, with something unexpressed, all wrapped in strange secrecy and expectation, afraid to move, and yet inviting. The trouble in her eye darkens, it is his last evening. He whispers that she is pretty—like that, with a listening look on her face—and she stares at him gently, wondering still, but catching a gathering confusion of feelings from the fire in his glance—they are screened from the others.

"Look at that bat!" he says, and lays his hand on her arm; with their faces close together they gaze into the garden, seeing nothing, and the trouble in her eyes wakens suddenly to the light

that has burnt in his. When his grasp tightens, it is as if a little pale flame played all over her, burning her cheeks. He stoops close to her : " Angela, dear !—I want to tell you——!" The sweetness of it ! She shuts her eyes ; with her face lifted she looks like some pale flower that has just opened itself to the sun.

A pleasant, authoritative voice breaks in : " Half-past nine, girls ! Collect your things."

The dream flies ; Angela says good-night in a scared kind of way, only a little whiter, and more cold than usual.

* * * * *

About ten years later, waking up one day to the fact that none of her daughters have married, Mrs. Blundell-Napier is surprised and pained ; she feels she did her best.

XXV

PERPETUATION

THERE are married women about whom one wonders : “ What *did* the man see in her ? ” She is not amusing, there was no money, only moderate beauty, good figure, complexion, health in the flash of her white teeth. But put her beside any of the enchantresses of our acquaintance ! Yet her husband idolises her !

She is always a mother . . .

In her daughter we see her again, not quite so tall, nor so long in feature, but with the same fair hair, white skin, blue eyes, the same lack of fire—or any spiritual qualities.

She leads a quiet, healthy life in her home surrounded by green fields.

Young Blank, home for the holidays two or three times a year, sees her in church, in the halo of a Sunday hat. One spring, having a longer vacation than usual, they are thrown together ; life quickens for them, and then there comes the inevitable evening when they go that silent walk.

A missel-thrush, with pale speckled breast, sings the same note over and over ; it is an appeal to something, a plaintive calling, with the sweet beginnings of a thrill.

A beam of evening sunlight flashes over them, the wet meadows shine like gold ; birds flutter softly, nothing is still, nothing can rest, a sweeter breath is added to the spring ; among its round flat leaves a violet opens, a dark purple like the wet earth and the storm clouds ; faint, delicious, like a gleam of sun along a silver morning sky.

When they get back to the garden again the young man feels he is treading on air ; he touches her, takes her hand, looks at her—and at that touch she suddenly grows taller, fuller, until for him she is the whole spring evening.

That clear, apple-green light in the west is here, in her face, become paler ; that scent of lime trees, her hair ; that fluttering, rustling, expanding of buds, the promise of her, wide as cornfields.

Her eyes darken while they stand gazing at one another, she feels all at once as though the sky were a crown about her head : Power, Womanhood. This is the most spiritual moment they attain, when she finds, as it were, her birthright in the scheme of things.

Invitations to the wedding reach us some day : we raise our eyes. “How did it happen !” We go—to see !

In the train, passing a carriage with a white bow on the whip, we feel the first little thrill of excitement.

Old friends go to the bride’s room—a little room with a sloping roof which she has shared with her younger sister. She is standing in the middle of it, draped in white, with a long veil of Brussels net falling all over her. She has to keep still because

her train is spread over the two little beds, and it is ten minutes to the service yet.

A group of bridesmaids hover round her, pinning, arranging, holding up their hands ; very girlish in their low-necked, pale silk frocks, with their big hats and bunches of flowers.

We greet the bride.

"This was mother's veil—" she explains, "and Aunt Cissy's scarf ; and *his* mother gave this lace—that was granny's—"

"Aren't you excited ? "

"Oh, no, my dear, I got over that *ages* ago."

A bell begins to ring, the chief bridesmaid lays a sheaf of lilies along the bride's arm. Every one has turned out for the wedding—village folk a-gape, crowding over the graves, children holding garlands ; the old, dark, country church looks young again with its host of slim white flowers.

There is the flash of silk and jewellery, each one dressed to the limit of their wardrobe ; a whisper of expectation, suddenly drowned in the first notes of the organ. Then very slowly, like a pale, slow-travelling beam of sunlight in a dark wood, the bride moves up the aisle.

Long, and rich, and heavy is her train ; orange blossom crowns her now.

Into all young hearts comes a solemn gladness, and into older ones a yearning that makes eyes wet.

We can see the young bridegroom, waiting ; and those who are women in the congregation feel that power is shed upon them. The two come together ; we hear the bridegroom repeat : ". . . To have and to hold, for better for worse, for richer for

poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part."

And suddenly our faces are flushed for them both, our hearts beating with them, for courage of the great adventure.

He takes the ring, and in the same deep voice says the words that bind them : "With this ring I thee wed, with this body I thee worship——" and his voice trembles a little there. We lower our eyes.

Then the village organ begins to pound and gasp the "Wedding March." A breeze of whispering and congratulation rises. After all, we must feel genial ; we are the human race standing together against a thousand calamities, and we have sealed here one small victory.

Bride and bridegroom sweep down the aisle ; she is suffused with colour; like the blush roses in the bridesmaids' bouquets.

"Young things—adventuring." The old ones gulp at one another, with eyes still red and smiles of infinite indulgence.

The bride is photographed ; alone, with her veil thrown back, then with him, then with all the bridesmaids ; lastly, a family group, her aunts, grown long of feature, like old horses, the clergyman with his head on one side and an air of judicious joviality.

There is champagne going about, wedding cake—"Wedding!" It takes one back to the oldest, primeval days, savages decked in flowers, dancing, shouting, because natural law has drawn two together for the preserving of their tribe.

Bridesmaid and best man are smiling at one

another ; matrimony is in the air, speculation begins already : "Who'll be the next ? "

The bride appears in her going-away dress, self-possessed, receiving, not giving—as yet.

Her mother cries a little to see the young life going away from her so calmly, settled into maturity, not lingering to enjoy the rosy moment. Rice is thrown, the old shoe tied on, the motor hurries with them out into life.

And when we have wiped our eyes and said how well it has gone off, we feel within us how it was that nature worked in the man to make his choice. And we say of that wedding : "They will do us credit." But we mean—"Perpetuation!"

XXVI

AN OLD INDIAN

(I)

A NUMBER of Indian officers always settle in the same neighbourhood. Somewhere in the pine trees, so that each can make the discovery every morning that it is like the Himalayas. Roomy, red-tiled, creeper-covered, their houses only differ inside according to the personality of the colonels' wives.

They all have elephants' trunks for umbrella stands, stuffed alligators for ornaments, there are battle-axes on the wall and long bowie knives ; entering, one hangs one's cap on a wild boar's tusk !

Once inside Colonel Fanshawe's drawing-room, for instance, one finds an air of eternal siesta. A lofty, white-walled room that recedes from the eye, and always stays a little dimly in one's memory ; one's instinct, however, is to go back to it.

There are books, gold and leather bound, on some far table : "Sintram and Undine," "Treasures of Sacred Song," "British India" ; nothing escapes from them.

There are plants, white lilies standing in the fire-place, blue-grey eucalyptus leaves ; there are a hundred curiously-carved ornaments, silver, and bronze, and ebony ; but they are all subservient to

some stronger, though colourless spirit in the room.

Towards the end of summer there comes a day of clear lights on the trees, smoke going straight up, and here and there a yellow leaf falling, turning over in the still air ; the spirit of this day seems to be embalmed in some of these Indian drawing-rooms, an autumn tint in their yellowing photographs, an autumn sound in the chords of their old grand pianos, sweet, but a little jangled. The colonel's wife comes into the room, one sees it in her smile.

Mrs. Fanshawe is tall, with a north-country look about her high cheek-bones ; her face is pale now, that grey, withered pallor of Anglo-Indians ; her hair, thick and glossy, is touched with silver ; blue eyes are in her face as that touch of sky, that cleanliness after rain on an autumn day ; they glitter more by reason of her paleness.

When she holds out strong, thin hands in welcome one knows that the mistress of this room has entered it.

It is the pleasantest thing in the world to drop in on a Sunday afternoon and see those white hands flashing in and out of tea-caddies, to watch the blue flame licking the silver kettle, and to listen to the low talk, always friendly, without hurry, the quiet "Do you remember ?" conversation, with its touch of reminiscence and the past ; always India ! The colonel, his blue eyes twinkling like a boy's, calls up some scrape young "Blank" of the Gourkhas got into, Lady Chichester reminds Mrs. Fanshawe of the earthquake at Ragapore ; towards the end of the afternoon, General Chichester asking : "Where's

your boy Hal gone off to ? ” Colonel Fanshawe answers absently : “ Oh, he’s in the compound.”

Pleasantly the sun shines on them in the morning. Mrs. Fanshawe goes to feed her chickens. Prayers are read by the colonel in an abrupt voice ; they are short and to the point ; thanksgiving to the arm that has guarded them in their comfortable beds, praise for the fruits of the earth, responded to in very low tones, so that for a moment, over the bowed heads, one sees that they have reached their haven—“ Home ”—at last.

Breakfast is a silent meal, but cheerful—a spirit lamp at one end of the table, bacon and eggs at the other.

The colonel always whistles and exclaims : “ I say ! ” when he opens his paper ; a discussion as to the “ present state of affairs ” makes him pout and stare at the ground as though expecting an explosion ; his eyebrows fly up, the look of bewilderment that first came into his eyes when he found himself “ retired ” starts out at you.

“ Give the beggars a good lickin’,” he mumbles, or “ I say, Lil, just listen to this ! ” And Mrs. Fanshawe responds with *her* eyebrows raised over the tea-pot, and the quiet smile with which she attends to four or five people all telling her different things at once.

There is a little talk about the trap, the harness being mended, whether they will drive or not—The colonel lights his pipe.

They are busy the whole morning, going to-and-fro “ seeing to things ” with simple direct energy ; the colonel cutting the tennis court or tinkering for

hours with some broken hinge ; his wife moving swiftly between pantry and store-cupboard, counting eggs, picking fruit for jam, a sunbonnet on her grey hair, an apron over her lilac cotton frock.

Only in some far corner of the garden the youngest daughter, half a tom-boy still, lounges with an unopened book and a feeling of resentment that she doesn't understand herself. Everything is at peace around her, long orchard grass against her face, deep shadows beneath the chestnut, sun streaming through the leaves of a gnarled apple tree, where the round fruit hangs golden and seems to swell with each hour.

Only the droning of bumble bees, only the thud of an apple in the grass—the stillness, drowsiness, profusion of an old garden. "*Security!*" The girl's flushed cheek presses the stalks of flowers spun together with spider webs !

After lunch comes the silent hour, when every one in the house seems to have died.

Faint fragrance steals from the rose in the silver vase on Mrs. Fanshawe's little table, a photograph of the eldest son in his Bengal Lancer uniform stands there ; when she sits knitting in her low chair, the lamplight falling on her neck and arms, she often looks at it—it is she who puts the rose each day.

Peaceful, pleasant are these evenings, when it seems as though there were no sound or hurry in the world, when night keeps softly to herself in the garden and no cry comes in ; and the colonel, drowsing a little in his chair, presses to his cheek some book of boys' adventures !

About this time every year the question of holi-

days comes up, a change—the colonel looks run down, he is getting terribly bald, Mrs. Fanshawe is too thin—

"I shall take my wife, and the boy, over to Brittany" he says in July.

"I can't leave the chickens," is her excuse.

"I shall send him to Scotland!" she says in August.

"She's sending me to Scotland!" he confides to every one. "But I'm not going! No, no—I shall take her to the sea!" But no final orders come from the War Office, and they still wait, as though unable to move without that impetus.

Then some old friend comes to dine and finds the colonel looking very bad; and all in a blow, before he can take it in, Mrs. Fanshawe packs his clothes, collects train books, writes labels. He goes about with a startled air, pulls at his moustache, pouts, expostulates; on the eve of departure he gets a sore throat! Or a letter from Cousin Maggie comes begging them to put her up for a week or two; she is a poor relation, hospitality is sacred. He frowns prodigiously; but outside he twinkles and laughs like a boy. "They can't get rid of me now!" He chuckles; "Maggie would kill my wife in a fortnight! Such a good woman, but slow! Slow!" And he collects all the little baby girls he can find, has them on his knees at once, and reads them "Alice in Wonderland."

On the last morning of the holidays their youngest boy makes a flute from a bicycle pump, and plays "God Save the King" on it! A freckled, snub-nosed, merry-eyed youngster "their" son, clean-

limbed, strong, with an obstinate twist if his honour is touched. Easy-going, frank, untroubled by imagination, generous to a fault—he will get his temper up in war, and fight like a devil on half rations!

The Fanshawes have a grape vine ; this year, to be enterprising, they would sell their grapes, but they couldn't bear to see those round, juicy bunches hanging so temptingly ; before they had been ripe a week—they gave them all away !

The last Sunday in every month sees the colonel and his wife at the early service ; the sun slants in over them through a side door where a leaf hangs emerald ; there are quiet shadows in the little church, the restful certitude of a thought that has been undisturbed for centuries.

Mrs. Fanshawe's back is straight as a girl's, her face, pale and serious, touched with serenity his—more wondering, but trustful. It is for them, perhaps, that the bells still ring on Sunday.

The clergyman murmurs words of admonition, they say "Armen" ; he speaks of a narrow way and a jealous, personal God.

Along the back of the seat Colonel Fanshawe surreptitiously finds and presses his wife's hand. She is the mother of his children, backbone of the British Army ; in her quiet way she is a mother of thousands.

(2)

THE Blundell-Napiers' eldest daughter went to India last autumn.

G.B.

x

With this departure, uneasiness, a sense that he was not doing his duty fell upon Colonel Fanshawe.

He went about shaking his head, with his brows drawn together and his lip thrust out ; his wife was often to be seen setting down figures on bits of paper.

The eldest boy was in India with his regiment, doing well ; their eldest daughter married out there ; the youngest son would inevitably go there ; and now—we heard that the Fanshawes had sold their pony trap—the youngest girl was going.

How many evenings it took them, sitting in their big Indian drawing-room, to reach this decision no one knows.

“After thirty-six years out there—you get nervous, you think too much !” the colonel often said, so he sat with straining eyes and thought too much ; firelight flushing his thin face, and gently tingeing his long, thin moustache, and kissing his bald head ; for a man must weigh the pros and cons, and it is rough and painful work to come to a decision—after thirty-six years in a system that had made decisions for you. And his wife, paler than usual, and the girl, more flushed, both tried to help him think. Little mists of pain would come over his blue eyes, and then the far-off look all service men wear when they walk alone, the look that means they have gone in search of their best years ; they are fighting, marching, hunting, they are like ghosts of men at that moment. The girl would poke the fire, and the colonel, coming back with a start, would exclaim :

“Oh, I say !”—slapping his knee, his eyes

twinkling at some memory—when they twinkled they were like nothing so much as spring itself, all that time of shaking dewdrops, and simplicity, and frosty stars.

His daughter would cry : “ Father ! ” And the startled look of a naughty child widening his eyes, he would begin to think again.

Mrs. Fanshawe would turn the lamp low—they must save to do this thing ; and all that was Indian in the room, taking life and colour in the firelight, came out at her from the walls. A red flicker on big brass trays, the shadow of horns, a gleam of bowie knives ; photographs, endless yellow photographs : “ There’s your black evening dress——” her pencil would begin moving on the paper.

They applied for a troopship free passage, and began going up to town about clothes.

The colonel wore the startled look of a man who has somehow been taken advantage of :

“ There’s no such hurry ? ” he would say. But there was hurry in his daughter’s eyes, a look of fearful hope, and every week she came back, as it were—secretly carried the new blouse, or the bargain hat—to her little bedroom.

A troopship berth is given at twenty-four hours’ notice. Each time the possible date came her hands went cold and stayed so till the time passed ; and she went up silently to unpack. And the colonel, with a great feeling of relief, would say many times : “ We’re doing the right thing ! We’re doing the right thing ! ” And to himself, “ Thank God, it isn’t this boat ! ”

For he had begun to think how quiet the house

would be when this fair-haired, rosy, blue-eyed girl of theirs was gone ; as though a man should come suddenly and take all the yellow corn from your barn, rob you of the fruitage of years. What was this house ? The spot he had been moving towards all his life, the one immovable, safe oasis in a desert where all was change and chance ? . . . He had shot his tiger for it, spent his pay on bronze and ivory, married his wife—they had worked together for it, this quiet, drowsy-looking house among its creepers, with a sound of wood-doves, and blue smoke going up, and crows under the fruit trees, all as it should be.

There had been sunny days, gently coloured with Indian memories, present and past linked together, like their daughter's hat and the elephant tusk upon which it hung in the hall.

Their drawing-room was faintly soaked in Eastern perfumes, grey-leaved plants, and sandalwood ; Indian rugs, fading as the fire of the East fades from a man's cheek in English rain . . . then . . .

" Pepper ! Good dog ! Where are you ? " A girl's fresh voice every morning ; that scamper of feet downstairs ; and the colonel's eyes twinkled, and he whistled, dressing himself.

The spirit of all he had done seemed to crown him when he met his daughter's laughing face at breakfast and kissed her lips.

Yellow stars of jessamine flowers came out on the walls, under dull skies when everything else seemed sleeping ; so on quiet days, when the past would have possessed them—there was her sulkiness, or the breeze of temper, a door banged, boots thrown

down ; or her body flung careless on the old springs of his pet armchair, and her talk of the future.

When the colonel looked at the first-born baby he had said : " Queer little beggar " ; but his eyes had been as solemn as the child's, and he had felt very young ; so now he looked at his daughter, and unconsciously believed himself eighteen.

Eighteen ? . . . Not that !

And he was going to send youth away ; it was like pulling down the blinds and sitting each in their chair in the shadowy drawing-room, he and his wife, and saying : " Come—Age, there's nothing to hold us——"

" We're doing the right thing——" he would say, and shake his head.

The pile of clothes grew each week upstairs, and those other Indian families, their dear old friends, the Blundell-Napiers, all worked their sewing machines to help this trousseau for the East.

" She won't go now," he said at Christmas.

Their eldest son sent home ten pounds ; there was a far-away look growing in the girl's eyes, as though her spirit had gone already.

In January, when the snowdrops were out and a thick sprinkling of small, early violets—on the very day the first little primrose was picked by the colonel before breakfast and laid on his wife's plate, the wire came : " Berth vacant ; boat sailing in two days."

At her farewell party their daughter's cheeks blazed ; the colonel looked at her young figure in her Sunday frock—a tussore silk, the same colour as her hair, with a touch of green at the throat ; and

he thought how sweet she looked. The squeeze at his heart drew in his lean, creased face. Mrs. Fanshawe, busy as ever with the tea-pot, was suffering, too ; pale, silent, suffering, with a smile.

The blue-grey plants in the drawing-room seemed leaning forward more alive, mimosa in the green-house sent out warm heavy breaths of sweetness ; firelight danced on the yellow photographs ; the spirit of the room was triumphing.

That last evening the colonel sat with his hand fastened on his child's and spoke cheerfully of the splendid time she was going to have ; his heart ached, his eyes smarted, he kept rubbing and stroking her hand. Mrs. Fanshawe, in her low, gentle way, was giving warnings—boardship flirtations ! Her face was heavy with suffering as though she had not slept for many nights.

And there was a lump in the girl's throat, and a bright tear in her eye, and fever in her heart ; this home had never seemed so perfect, or so snug, her father and mother had never seemed so dear—but already it was as if she had taken the plunge. Her heart beat like a bird's that is being held.

They suffered most, because the plunge had not yet come for them—she was still here to be counselled, to touch, and to look at ; their room was alive with the light in her eyes.

It is probable the colonel woke early, alone in his dressing-room—she was sleeping with her mother that last night—and stared out over the sheets with the bewildered look of a child saying, “ Why should I suffer ? ” . . . It would come right, it was all for

the best ; but meantime . . . One doesn't know, perhaps his eyes were wet.

A busy hour in the twilight of winter dawn, a last tying-on of labels, looking at lists, repeating the promise not to land anywhere *en route*.

A little *cortège* of friends at the station : one of those crisp, clear days just veiled in a mist of frost melting off the long grass, a spicy, racy chilliness in the wind, a scent of spring coming, and a multitude of birds in song.

The colonel's eyes were very bloodshot, his wife's seemed bruised, with purple marks beneath, and the tip of his daughter's nose was slightly reddened in the chilly English breeze. They all smiled, and the colonel kept laying his hand on anything young and warm they met with among their friends on the platform.

The train was late, and it was dreadful to have to hope that it would be in time, yet wish that it would never come at all !

They went with her to Southampton and saw her on board. Seeing the ship, smelling old scents of oil, and tar, and rope, the smell of ships, it seemed like days of past adventure when it was they who sailed, and they were comforted.

She had a general's daughter and an admiral's niece in her cabin, all going out on the same mysterious duty.

There were friends on the passenger list—old Calthorp of the 2nd Gourkhas ; his wife would see to their girl ; Lady Calthorp—she would be all right with her.

They laid flowers from home on the cabin table,

a few crumpled violets, a snowdrop ; when they went on deck it was raining.

That last half-hour !

Slippery, streaming boards, grey land under grey sky, grey sea between, and the band playing, "Auld lang syne."

She was a worthy daughter of good worthy stock, and, though at this moment she could have laid her head down on her mother's neck and wept like the clouds, she laughed ; they all smiled ; the colonel kept patting her on the back or squeezing her cold hand in his.

The last clutch, the last snatched kiss ; a hurry of people all treading on each other, and the great boat beginning to glide through the water. Those desperate moments in the rain and wind, running alongside for the last look, the last farewell wave.

They ran so long that they missed their train and had to sit a long while by the pale embers in a station waiting-room. They had done their duty. It might hurt, it might feel sore and lonely, as if the flower of life were wrenched suddenly from the middle of their hearts, leaving only a great gap of emptiness—but they had done their duty.

And surely far off, under its dancing heat haze, the East smiled at that moment. They had given their own life and vitality, and now this last offering. No one saw them in the waiting-room, but it is probable they sat like two in a church, silent, devout, with their heads bowed.

And home again, in their dear room full of tusks

and spears and tiger skins, what could they do in the silence but hold each other's hands and slip back gently into the past, there being no laugh to hold them, no sound but the ashes falling, no presence but the East—and dim, old age.

XXVII

LETTERS FROM THE OLD MALT HOUSE

(I)

OUR MEN

THERE'S a nook by the plum tree where the cat sleeps these September mornings ! Ferns and moss-rose bushes touch your shoulder, Michaelmas daisies bend over the path ; sunflowers, asters, pansies grow by the currant bushes, and there's a smell of wood smoke, a sudden buzzing of all the flies—a sudden silence . . . the warm light soaks into you, it is good to be alive.

Sitting there one morning I heard the squire's wife go by. "Good news !" she was saying ; "our men have advanced . . . !"

Mrs. Bashford is tall, with a firm figure, and strong blue eyes, her pale yellow hair is still crisp ; all those jolly little excursions to the Himalayas, to her husband's Norwegian salmon fishery, to winter sports in Switzerland and summer suns in France, have stained her face nearly as hard a red as east winds and work have stained the village mothers.

Full of "go" ; slowness and stupidness she never could stand, so that, meeting old cottagers toddling to their gates, her eyes became harder, her voice more crisp. In pre-war days the sight of those

"young ya-hoos" in town used to make her feel sick.

Now her face is a shade redder, her eyes more blue; depths have stirred, a pulse called "patriotism," and a throb called "love": for of course her own son went to battle . . . but all these "fools," those "fellows with no stamina," those "town louts" and "village idiots"—went to battle too . . .

Mrs. Bashford is a patriot; she has let dress, society, even her garden go for the joy of "nursing."

She has taken over the catering for the village "hospital" (her bailiff's house), and she bears down on it at nine every morning in the car, making that special breeze of her own, a gale of superior freshness, sharp, even chilly—if one can imagine ice on boiling water.

She works all day now for "our men," making "proper soup" and jelly; and every week she turns her drawing-room upside down for great car-loads of convalescents from the county hospital.

All her lady helpers put on their best frocks, their kindest faces, their most "please feel at home" manner. Mrs. Bashford's white drawing-room is full of cheap smoke—"for they must smoke what they like, you know!"

Tea, piano solos, songs, elegant ladies talking to the men very kindly, but rather as you talk to little boys at a school treat; trying to make them "feel happy," talking "down" to them in their conscious effort *not* to "talk down."

And the soldiers have queer expressions . . . jolly fellows, but up there, in their light blue hos-

pital clothes, in a setting of tiger skins and "maiden-hair" fern, eating grapes and listening to the violin—they look a little like cats being stroked. And one or two (of the rougher sort)—rather bitter, as though saying: "Now 'alf o' me's been blown up—you can give me some o' yer bloomin' cream! Deuce take yer!"

Thinking of Mrs. Bashford I wondered, since the bravery of the men has made them "ours," how do we feel toward their mothers?

If we had troubled to know their mothers should we have been so surprised at their bravery?

Young Filmer of this village got the Victoria Cross. . . .

What is his mother like?

She is a washerwoman and does all the house linen for Mrs. Bashford. That means getting up at five to "start the copper," hours of stooping over steamy clothes, sharp work wringing them, hours of straining to hang them on a windy line; hours of ironing, goffering (and cooking for her "man," a deaf old labourer, and for her lodger).

"She's quite a character," the vicar's wife might tell you:

"She had cancer for ages and no one knew it! Oh, it began with what she called a "heat spot." I remember advising her to see the doctor; I believe she did—but he's a busy man, you know; he gave her a bottle of iodine—'swollen gland, you know'; and she went on painting it for years.

"Of course if we'd *known!*

"Then one day she said she couldn't take the washing; Mrs. Bashford was quite put out—she's

the only woman here who really *can* wash. . . . It appeared she couldn't use her arm. 'What's it now?' I asked her. 'It's the same thing, ma'am.'

"'What thing?'" She opened her dress. . . . Oh! I never had such a shock!

". . . Of course we sent her to the hospital; quite a good man had to do it—the whole of her left breast, right through to the shoulder blade. . . . And the nurses told us she was the best patient they'd ever had, never complained! She said she didn't 'go to complain, but to get well!' . . ."

The washerwoman's cottage stands down a lane by an old storm-bent fir tree; indoors, of an evening, you'll hear a gramophone playing, "God save the King"; Mr. Filmer will open the door to you:

"How's your wife??"

"Eh??"

"Your *wife*??"

"Eh??"

And you step into a room like an oven. No wonder Mr. Filmer's face looks roasted! Puffs of hot air come from some back region where the copper stands, and in this room itself is the kitchen fire. A tidy, clean, "superior" room, cram full of "valuables," family photographs, great blue pots of bullrushes, and jars of flagging dahlias.

Mrs. Filmer is a pale woman with dull brown hair brushed up from an oval face that shines; her dark eyes tell you nothing, her lips have no colour.

"You're very kind!" she'll keep saying, as though trying to console you for having come.

"Your son!" you shout to the deaf old man, and

to Mrs. Filmer. "Your Tom is one of our best boys!"

That mother's smile is like the pale green sunset.

"And how are *you*?" you'll ask. A dreadful, slow, stupid stare comes into her eyes: "Oh, doin' nicely, thanks . . . but I can't . . . sleep . . ."

"Can't sleep? How's that?"

"She've pain, the missus," her husband grunts, and Mrs. Filmer smiles, and you think her face is going to melt.

"I can't sleep . . ." she says again.

"We'll send you something. Don't work, don't get up early. Rest more . . ." you beg, and see that first half-quizzical look come back. Her "Thank ye, kindly," is obviously a "soother" for you.

"Shocking atmosphere to live in," you say coming out, and walk very fast, trying to forget the touch of Mrs. Filmer's hot, wet hand.

. . . But wherever you look the waxy whiteness of that woman's face swims up. She is still washing for Mrs. Bashford—her son is one of "our" men.

(2)

HOP-PICKING

SEPTEMBER's the time for thinning out the cress-beds—it's the time for hop-picking. We get up at five o'clock! There was a delicious smell of bacon downstairs this morning. Mildred—the youngest little Holiday—stood blinking in the early sunlight. Mrs. Holiday was flushed already by that race of

hers with the minutes (she is tall and strong, with a patch of red on each cheek-bone and steady grey eyes) ; she never stops all day, her brown hair gets a little streaky, her red cheeks more flaring—but my supper table has its full amount of ornamental jam-spoons.

Mr. Holiday is a market gardener ; good-looking, hard working, “fond of music on Sundays,” when they all sing “Fight the good fight” ; and he reads a Liberal and a Conservative paper side by side—because he was “brought up that way.”

We started with Mildred in her pram, our bag of food, coats, umbrellas and the kettle, and passed presently under a line of splendid walnut trees, thinning, getting spidery, but gorgeous in brown and gold ; then the lane became a stream, with long grass and stones and water splashing round the cart ; we drew up ; Mrs. Holiday’s long arms grappled with the pram, so that Mildred’s very round, blue eyes saw the earth at strange angles.

“Got your bottle of tea, Ted ?”

“Right-oh !”

“That’s where he’s goin’, there’s the cress-bed—yonder where the water’s runnin’ ; we go this way. There’s the hop-garden,” said Mrs. Holiday.

Long lines of aspen trees and alders are planted to “keep the wind off”—the sound those trees make is a revelation of leaf music ; big heart-shaped leaves, very smooth and shiny, and never still an instant. Beyond stood rows of “bines” trained over wires, thousands of long green walls and roofs shaking, dancing, covered with clusters of pale green flowers as it might be fruit. And

scattered about this sea of leaves women in blue aprons.

The smell of the hops came to us.

"I like hoppin'," smiled Mrs. Holiday. "Most ladies after they're married don't hop no more; it's not considered right at all, when you're settled in life, I mean, like me . . . but I love a day in the hops. See that lady there? Her in the pink jacket—that's who we're goin' to help. That's the farmer's servant. The farmer's wife'll come out presently—she takes a bin for pin-money."

"What's a 'bin'?" I wondered—then saw a queer brown canvas thing on long brown poles, with a wooden edge upon which we sat—when the servant had made room for us with the deathly lazy smile of an anæmic.

Mrs. Holiday grasped one of those green festoons . . . a sharp "Ting!" the string broke, a thud! the hop bine fell on my head!

"You begin tail-end," she cautioned me, "turn the bine on your knees, so, and pick from under; strip 'em clean, no leaves!"

A perfect river of hops flowed through her hands, making a pale green mountain in the bin; but I felt inclined to dance—with those young tendrils round my sunbonnet and on my neck, with the leaves of the next bine brushing my cheek, and hops bobbing between my fingers!

Far away a voice shouted: "One, two, three, four . . . Tally!" I saw every one scour for leaves; the farmer was coming—a huge man, with merry little sparkling black eyes and a face like a furnace; he had a basket and was

followed by an old man dragging some huge kind of sack.

"That's a 'poke,'" Mrs. Holiday told me.

The farmer drove his arms deep into the hops, hoisted them into the basket, and tipped them into a sack, shouting : "One . . ."

There's something bitter and fresh in the smell of hops, better than beer, greener ; Mrs. Holiday says they smell of "brimstone" ; withered bines pulled yesterday get a pungent scent. And one's hands turn black—but the wet grass takes that off.

At midday the horn sounded, little fires were lit ; ours puffed glorious blue smoke against an orchard, making a great plum tree look dizzy ; there was a smell of wood burning. Mrs. Holiday fixed up the "drum," a sort of sooty kettle, and dropped in the tea with the milk and sugar, and boiled it all—it came out dark brown like oxtail soup, and was stirred with a hop leaf to "give it a flavour."

I had a hop pole for back rest, and when a little boy jumped on the bottom wire it set all the roof of our pergola leaping and rustling like paper.

Plums, bread and cheese, pastry, and wasps . . . blue sky, long white wind clouds, and an orchard flaming with Worcester apples ; fruit lying so deep it crunched under foot when we came through it.

Along the hop rows I saw women with faces the colour of the big purple virginia creeper leaves, I could hear them munching apples ; the wind died away, but the hops kept rustling with a sound like that of a bird flying.

One o'clock came with a noise like a cow in its last death agonies—the “horn.”

Hopping lasts three weeks, they tell me ; and all that time the babies cry—they are brought out like camp stools, umbrellas, laid down anywhere, in prams, foot baths, baskets (with the bread and cheese and bottled tea), and left to stare at terrifying dancing leaves ! The wind blows, the sun burns, they get awfully hungry, and their mothers won’t look ! All they get is a slap, or a shake, a rough “shut up !” when they roar. And the wasps buzz round their necks. Down every line you see them waving scarlet arms ; they “carry on” till they nearly have convulsions ! And then the horn blows . . . and there’s silence ! They’ve got what they want—a hot, familiar smell of clothes, their mothers’ red hands, their mothers’ wonderful big red faces, and the comfort of the breast.

They all go to sleep for an hour and life seems gone from the hop garden.

The day turned dark and steamy while we picked. “Storm comin’,” croaked the poke bearer ; those aspen trees turned dull, ashy white, withered, as if a hand had squeezed them ; there was suddenly a rumble like a far-away waggon, a drop of rain ; all the mothers snatched up their babies ; it was as dark as evening ; the first flash of lightning showed a wave of old umbrellas . . . and then came the deluge.

We ran to the oast-house where the hops are dried and pressed ; it had a smell like the smell of plenty—nutty and sweet ; hops lay in pale drifts like harvest moonlight, and the old man sweeping them with a besom broom raised dust like pollen ;

all the floor he had cleared was yellow as honey. I was shown the furnace and the great sacks called "pockets," where the baked, pressed hops are packed.

We stayed late at the farm, and driving back, saw the sloe bushes change colour (moonlight comes first to them and tickles them all over), the stubble was one dim sheet like Jaeger wool, the clover—darkened, and at once it seemed that the yellow in the charlock had flown to the moon. The stubble became downy like a throbbing moth's wing, the charlock smelt sweet as at midday.

. . . "Can I ever live in a house again?"

When the hops are done I shall go to sea! Ships heave. Hearing the rattle of wind on ropes I should smell the hop bine! How still and flat the world must seem when the last bine comes down.

Summer and autumn, summer and autumn—they run out their last glorious race in the hop gardens; they reel down the rows, summer's cool greenery fluttered to rags; autumn—that rushing sound, that "speeding up," a shriller wind; the very soul of autumn in that deep blue sky. There's a sound of rending, as if all the hundred hands at work were ripping summer's dress; the rags turn yellow. That gale has the shriek of all the leaves in all the world, dry leaves smiting the green ones so there comes a long, soft sighing, a resistance; but autumn is chasing summer down hill into her grave.

. . . And all the ground is covered with the shadow of their dance.

(3)

MISS AUDREY

MRS. HOLIDAY asked me if I'd care to come blackberrying (she was running her arm through four or five handles and shouting : "Where's the 'kibbsey' ?"). In a few minutes we were off. The baby in a bright blue smocked frock just the colour of her big blue eyes, Peggy, aged fourteen, with cheeks like peonies, the boys gnawing apples, and jolly Mrs. Holiday laying her tongue on them as it might be a stick. "Let go, Reggie ! . . . Jack ! Jack ! leave Mildred alone ! . . . Look out, Peggy, you'll tip the drum—" Peggy was carrying the black pot we boil in the hop gardens.

"Oh, what a day !" we all kept saying. The hillside was just the colour of a yellow hazel leaf, wraiths of milky mist hung over the hedges, the sun shone in a blue sky full of shimmering breath, and close to us old hawthorns were bursting with berries.

Then, while we whistled and laughed, and the boys leaped over the thistles—a great wind like a draught covered the world with mist so that the sky rolled on us and we became phantoms to each other. The mist darkened ; for one moment a marvellous snow-white rainbow stood over us all ; next moment the grass was wet ! High up on the blackberry hills there's a hazel wood ; it was dry there, so we left the children and the picnic things and went on to face the weather. The grey, wet grass showed a yellow footprint where you trod,

water slopped in our shoes, but we didn't care ! We had caught the picking fever, when one huge berry after another flies through your fingers, and still your eyes see more and more, and the briars catch your clothes, and the furze and hawthorn spike your chest !

I saw my landlady's face flame over the bushes ; she picks like lightning into a deep, heavy basket that holds sixteen pounds and that she fills in an hour !

" . . . We couldn't come here before the war," she told me ; " the fruit had to rot for the pheasant shootin' . . . "

At twelve o'clock we came back to the wood and found the babies crying—" because they built a house an' Miss Audrey knocked it over, passin'."

" Who's she ? " I asked.

" Oh, she's a funny sort of restless lady——"

" Lives at the big red house down the village, the family vault in church belongs to 'er. It was 'er pa an' ma gave the organ." This from Mrs. Secker, my landlady's sister—a young woman with a harsh voice, a splendid colour, and a bad tumour on her neck.

" What's this Miss Audrey doing up here ? " I wondered.

" Ah ! " said my landlady, " just the sort of day she *would* be out ! "

" You don't like her ? "

" Oh, I don't know her. She's a bit queer, I daresay——"

" How ? "

" She goes milkin'. Oh, I expect she's very good——"

I was interested. I've heard ladies speak in just that tone of voice about some *parvenue* who has failed to please them . . . I felt rather sorry for Miss Audrey.

"Where does she go milking ?" I asked.

"Any farm where they're short of men."

"War work ?"

"Yes."

Peggy lit the fire and we were all busy feeding it. Mrs. Holiday reached up and bent over a strong sapling to hang the drum on ; sheets of light blue smoke rushed up and sheets of flame that veered in our faces wherever we stood ! In a jiffy we pulled off our wet stockings to hang them by the drum. Soon we had settled in a ring like gipsies, the fire burnt smaller and hotter, the water boiled, the tea was "brewed." Tea straight from the fire comes hot. We drank cup after cup while the wet mist looked for us ; we could see it rolling round and could hear the wind like a great dog sniffing—just then I saw one of the boys, who had slipped off to gather nuts, standing between two bushes, staring, and close beside him a lady. Mrs. Holiday nudged her sister. "There she is !" they whispered. I saw a woman of thirty, with a pale, plain, rather bored face, an aquiline nose, brown eyes, thin lips, and dark hair under an old sou'wester hat. She had on a light brown shooting coat of some good stuff that would last for years. She carried blackberries, too.

"Hullo !" she called, "how many pounds, Mrs. Holiday ?"

"Oh, about thirty-eight."

"Good!" She drew near to our fire and began that rather jerky, bumpy conversation occasioned by a desire to talk on the part of one person and a desire for silence in the others.

"Are you milkin' now?" we asked.

"Not this week. I was up at four all last month, milking at French's farm—that's nothing! Cold? Pooh! . . . Frightened? One cow kicked me over. Yes, I didn't care to milk her again for a bit . . . What time do *you* get up, Mrs. Secker? . . . The cows wouldn't come by the new time at first!"

Miss Audrey talked of country things with my landlady. Mrs. Holiday answered her readily, questioning mostly, advancing nothing on her own account; but I was conscious of a guarded note—it was there in her wide, flat, country voice like a counter-offensive to Miss Audrey's tone. I heard on one side of me: "Yes, I picked all those in an n'ah!" and on the other: "In an now-er! Did you ev-er!"

In profile Miss Audrey's face made me think of a toad I used to play with. She didn't turn her head to speak, merely dropped her eyelids, raised them, and let her brown eyes glance for an instant. The prominent bridge to her nose gave the effect of a complete suit of armour, all the friendliness of her pale smile couldn't undo the poise of her head. My landlady was about a foot taller in reality, but the action of Miss Audrey's eye placed her in the grass. And Miss Audrey talked lightly of washing up and sweeping—she had been doing them at her hospital—and my landlady's manner grew colder and colder.

" You talk of washing up," it seemed to say ; " wait till you *have* to do it—that's all ! " . . .

I understood that when Miss Audrey had washed up she could return to her Queen Anne home and sit at leisure, could do as she liked ; when Mrs. Holiday has washed up the last meal of the day she sits in a hot kitchen stitching for dear life to keep the boys' clothes together, with one eye on the jam cooking and one ear cocked for Mildred's crying, and however much she wants to, she can't go to bed till she has done. If Miss Audrey had complained they would *have* been closer together !

But she spoke lightly of work, and her remarks were interspersed with comments (to me) on " the glorious view " she had seen from some Swiss mountain

She nodded airily to Mrs. Holiday when our ways parted.

" What a lot Miss Audrey does—" I ventured.

" Yes," said my landlady, " she puts her nose into most things." . . . The pity is there's not much fellowship in noses.

XXVIII

“ IT IS FORBIDDEN TO TOUCH THE FLOWERS ”

M. ALPHAND, in a moment of inspiration, had the idea of transforming the great piece of waste land—known as “Buttes-Chaumont”—where the guillotine used to stand, into a public garden ; he made a lake and built a rocky grotto where stalactites hang down and long, waving wreaths of ivy ; where a cataract falls and the air is cool and shadowed. He arranged that noisy streams should flow over stones and boulders ; he planted trees and seems to have stood at the summit of his great work and scattered broadcast seeds of plants and flowers ; pink valerian clings to the walls, purple vetches, nasturtiums, irises rustle their broad leaves by the water where white lilies float. There is chestnut blossom in the spring, and lilac ; in the long, hot months of summer—the creamy privet. But, like all imitations, it lacks the essential charm of the great original—Nature ; for there are notices, and policemen with long swords, who walk about and say : “Keep off the grass”—“It is forbidden to touch the flowers.”

So the workmen who lounge about there, with wives and ragged children, rest their eyes with the sight of the smooth green lawns, with the quiet

grandeur of the trees, old and huge as giants now, feast their senses on the honey breath that winds about them from the privet ; but—they keep to the well-ordered paths, they sit on wooden seats as in the boulevard—and they don't look particularly happy ; mostly they are so tired they fall asleep.

A little Parisian workgirl sat perched on a rock far above the water, higher than the tops of the poplars ; close below her the troubled leaves of a quivering aspen, always blown back on themselves as though repulsed, just above, at the top of the stone stairway that wound up through the shadows of the rock, a round Italian temple.

It was Sunday afternoon, the month, July ; a dreamy haze of heat had fallen over the wide slope of the lower garden ; up here was the only place where the wind stirred a little as though in its sleep ; far out on each side in the distance stretched Paris, and the quivering heat that danced in the boulevards seemed to radiate through a black mist of smoke.

Like a skeleton chimney, high in the air, was stretched the long neck of the Eiffel Tower.

The girl sat with bent shoulders and her head thrust forward—her attitude while sewing in the workroom ; her dull, lack-lustre hair was loosely piled, long ends fell untidily on her dark, thin neck ; her eyes were of the same brown as her hair, soft, a little shadowy, a little hopeless ; her lips drooped like her narrow shoulders, her hands hung idle.

Slow, wide circles moved out on the water, round two ducks that were fighting, the shadows of trees

lay dark and quiet in reflection, with undulating edges ; in the distance, like the humming of a persistent fly, rose the noise of traffic in the streets of Paris.

She was an orphan, lodging with one of those stout women, in black serge dresses and dirty little black shawls, that one sees jostling their way through market-places ; a woman with a hard face the colour of brickdust, a short black moustache, and a voice as sharp as her beady eyes were grasping.

The girl thought of her life that had no colour or sweetness, long days that were passed down there under the smoke, one of the million beings who trudge the sunbaked cobble stones, submerged in the flood of want and sordid cares.

Her little aquiline nose showed in silhouette against the sky to one leaning over the parapet of the Italian temple above—a young, broad-shouldered workman in dark brown velvety corduroy trousers, a loose velvet coat, and open shirt-front—tired of looking at the trees.

He was eating cherries from a paper bag in his pocket, and being dull, he aimed a cherry-stone ; it shot from his fingers, and, it seemed a long time afterwards, was lost in the water far below ; he threw a second ; the third just hit the tip of the little thin nose ; her hand flew to her face, then she turned round and, looking up, saw the young workman leaning smiling above her, dangling a ripe cherry which he threw. She caught it, he laughed—and, as will happen sometimes when two strangers meet—they felt suddenly friends.

He came down the winding stairs and perched himself in front of her, holding out the bag of fruit. When she shook her head, confused, he emptied them into her lap, and seeing them rolling, falling into the lake, instinctive economy made her lean over and hold out her hands to catch them quickly.

“ They work you hard at your place, eh ? ” he asked, looking at her thin, drooping neck.

“ It’s the busy time, now.”

“ They keep you late ? ”

“ Till midnight, sometimes—we send the youngest out to buy some ham, we eat with our thimbles on our fingers ; ah, but it’s hot—down there, underneath ; we can see all the feet of the people on the pavements.”

“ Well, eat now, it’s Sunday. What’s your name ? ”

“ Lisette——”

“ Mine ? They call me ‘ Jean qui rit ’—you see, I always laugh ! ”

She was looking curiously, with a sort of friendly timidity at his thick black hair cut straight across the back of his neck, as though he were about to be guillotined. He intercepted her glance with a sweep of curly eyelashes—the word “ *apache* ” was almost on her lips.

“ It’s the fashion in my quarter, you know ; we’re not dangerous, we don’t carry knives ! ” he laughed. “ Come, little one—some colour.” He leaned over and hung red cherries for earrings each side of her face, so that they danced against her cheeks when she flushed and shook her head.

Something in her very lack of beauty, in her

contracted chest, the dark colour of her skin, the soft, slow movement of her eyes, attracted him, roused the primitive instinct of protection ; and he was one of those careless hand-to-mouth natures who are generous of everything. Fumbling in the bottom of the bag he took out a handful of red currants.

Lisette was what they call “ an honest girl ” ; as a rule men did not speak to her ; when they did—she shrugged indifferent shoulders, her life was too grey to allow of any dreams.

A breath stirred up from the leaves of the aspens and filled the limp folds of her cotton frock. To-day was different—half wondering at herself she took the currants, and the young workman watched while she lifted a bunch heavy with the little red berries and dropped it between her parted lips, closed her white teeth—the only bright feature in her face—and pulled out the green stalk bare of fruit and flung it from her.

He had clear green eyes, and under his dark, half-grown moustache, lips that were well formed ; when she met the bright light that played under his long lashes she felt a new thrill that was almost pain, it was so sweet for the moment. It satisfied something that her nature craved—it brought a strange aching—and a longing—“ I should go home,” she thought.

“ This is a jolly place. Look at those peacocks.”

“ Where ? where ? ” She leant over quickly, and leaning so, she touched his arm. It was a great height—peering down so far a feeling of giddiness

came over her ; a strong hand on her shoulder pulled her back ; with her eyes shut she whispered to herself, “ It’s Sunday—”

Then she gave way to his mood of laughter, and when he snatched a marigold that she had picked she slapped his face ; he came and sat on a nearer stone and she leant away—following an instinct of coquetry as deep and true as though she had played at flirting all her life ; every time she met the flash in those green eyes some new part of her nature woke, and with each awakening came fresh wants.

There were many bushes grown almost to trees of white privet in flower, and the hot sun had drawn out their heavy sweetness so that it lay on the air like a weight, languorous, penetrating, vaguely disquieting. There was a strong scent, too, from the pink valerian and from the marigolds.

Lisette and Jean talked, laughing easily at everything ; the colour had deepened in her face, as though some of the warmth of the summer, the sweetness of the flowers, had soaked into her, and she were gently expanding and radiating it forth again herself. Jean lit a cheap cigarette and began humming “ Caroline ! Caroline ! ” the popular air of the day. She felt she must look at him, and he must not sing and stare at the trees. It hurt her ; instinctively she let her eyelids droop.

He began pointing out buildings in the distance, she touched his foot with hers. He stood up ; a feeling almost of suffocation came to her, then weakness, her face grew pale. He would lift his cap and stride away down the winding stairs, and

leave her with all these new wants pulling at her heart, with these vague expectations . . . Without knowing it, her lips drooped again, her shoulders bowed as though in apprehension of a burden, her face seemed asking something.

The young workman flushed, then bent his head towards her ; he was still smiling, ready to laugh. Their eyes met, he stepped forward ; something bounded up in her spirit, her heart was all in confusion . . . With a glance—provocative, shy—she slipped from under his careless arm and ran from him to the steps. It was unexpected, it gave him a feeling of being cheated, it roused the primitive hunter—he sprang after her.

The stairway was dark, for it wound round and round the inside of the rock, with outlets here and there, where creepers hung and one had swift glimpses of blue sky ; the stones were worn into hollows, with broken edges and unequal lengths—but Lisette flew down them like a bird, her hands stretched out in front of her, her hair fallen loose on her shoulders, and a stinging taste of life on her lips ; her eyes were bright as stars.

Jean was heavier—and it is always more difficult to run with some one just in front : but near the bottom he gained, having leaped three stairs ; he was almost on her when she rushed out into the sunlight.

The path curved suddenly, and impelled by her own impetus, she jumped the low wire fence at the edge of the grass and rushed down a bank to the shade of some great acacias ; out of breath, laughing, triumphant, she threw herself down in

the soft green depth, hearing the quick panting, the sudden shaking of all the leaves, when a second later Jean fell over her—rolling on the cool grass.

She snatched a bough of privet blossom to hide her burning face, all her nature was tingling with joy ; what was coming—she neither knew nor cared—only it must be fulfilment, satisfaction.

He threw himself down beside her, and with a vigorous movement that filled her with ecstasy took her in his arms.

There was the sound of footsteps on the gravel, the chink of a sword in its scabbard. A voice said :

“ Hullo, there—It’s forbidden to touch the flowers ! ”

XXIX

HEARTLESS

At breakfast this morning, between sips of red wine and platefuls of watercress salad, Mademoiselle Bertin, an old maid, full of sentiment and illusions—speaking of my friend, Madame Revaliere, already a wife, a mother, and a widow :

“ . . . No, we never thought she was like that ! It was a great shock to us, my sister and I ; you understand we have known her for years. One day she was having tea here, just biting a cake, in fact, when she said quite quietly :

“ ‘ My husband is lost.’

“ ‘ In Heaven’s name, are you ill ? ’ we cried. ‘ What is this that you say ? Your husband is “ lost ” ? But he is a big, strong-looking man, well-looking, with his great beard, and his clear blue eyes—’

“ ‘ He is lost,’ she repeated, like that, without emotion. ‘ He has a fatal malady, nothing can be done ; the slightest chill, the slightest shock . . . we are both doctors, we both know it . . . but we keep it from Geneviève.’

“ She said it like that, just shrugging her shoulders ; but her eyes were not happy—and she went away soon.

“ ‘ How can one live ? ’ I said to my sister. ‘ How

can one live—and know that one's husband is lost ?'

"We didn't sleep—all that night.

"Well, you know what happened—it was in the winter. M. Revaliere caught a chill ; he was only ill three days, then he died. It was sudden ! And there was his wife struck down with a syncope of the heart ; and Geneviève, who is not strong, fallen, too, between life and death—

"Ah ! you can't imagine how terrible it was !

"We went to the funeral ; it was a Sunday, snowing and raining ; the coachmen bent their heads, and the carriages crawled, as though the horses and all were going to their own interment.

"Funerals make such an impression on me—it is the sight of the black pall, and the immortals, the silence, and the heaviness, that air of gloom . . .

"We went to call on Madame Revaliere afterwards, we felt it was the best we could do—to tell her how the service had passed and who was there ; to express our sorrow, to console her, to comfort her a little, to tell her, in fact—that death is inevitable, that one must bear it, that it is all in the mercy of Heaven. That she would meet her dear one again, that she must be brave for the sake of her daughter—in a word, all those little things one does say on such occasions.

"Ah ! what an impression that silent house made on me : the dark passage, and Geneviève lying so still—as white as her pillows—in one room, Madame Revaliere, with her dark hair unbound, in the other—

"I felt my hands tremble ; it was like going into a house of death with the corpses laid out.

"I could feel so well for her poor, pierced heart.

"Madame Revaliere took both my hands, genially, like this, and said, 'But, my dear friends, what faces !'

". . . We had composed ourselves to sorrow, you understand, outside the door.

"'What faces !' I tell you—it froze my heart ; that one could shake hands at such a time and smile. It was a shock to me.

"'Don't look like that—death is inevitable ! And my husband is not gone, he is here,' she said quite gaily. 'He would not leave me ; he is in my room and about my bed. I have been talking to him all the afternoon.'

"And she smiled.

"'Trouble,' I thought, 'has turned her brain !' I stammered something, but I had no words.

"'It's all in God's will——' (she began stroking my hand to console me). And I had pictured myself holding her head in my arms and wiping her tears !

"'Ah ! you will grieve by and by,' we whispered.

"'I have Geneviève to think of,' she said to me.

"Well, but was that a reason ? At such a time ?

"We spoke a little of the funeral and of the lovely flowers, and then we went away ; I think we felt more grieved than angry. Not a tear for the departed one ! And to have shaken hands !

"Who would have thought it ? A sincere woman, too, and one we had always believed true-hearted

and capable of great emotion. Devoted to her husband, one with him in all things . . . Yes, it was a shock to us, I tell you, I didn't get over that for months."

Mademoiselle Bertin wiped her grey, wrinkled, little face, then began to crumble her bread discontentedly on the red and white check tablecloth.

XXX

MEMORY

I ALWAYS remember going with my friend Madame Revaliere, last summer, to her garden in the country. She is a widow, a little, slight, black-haired woman, with dark grey eyes and quick, thin lips ; gentle, refined, and, at that time, still heavily swathed in crape.

Her husband bought this garden, intending to build. He had drawn all the plans, laid out flower beds and paths, planted fruit trees, designed a summer-house, and settled which little plants should border which beds. This was the first time his widow had visited it since his death.

We were very silent on the walk, a quiet pilgrimage to the land of memory. There she would be close to him, his voice would come back and all the passionate care he had bestowed on every detail of the garden.

But in springtime, when the lilac dies its place is taken by the rose ; life goes right on, without pause or mourning.

When we turned the rusty key in the iron gate . . . we stepped into a shaking, dancing wilderness : scarlet, crimson and blushing pink, no path, no beds, only tall grass under the apple trees, and the whole overgrown with poppies.

They were up to our waists, they shimmered in the sun ; I drew a breath of delight. All the cold shadow of our little expedition faded from my spirit. . . . I sat down among them and listened to the birds singing and the buzzing bees, and watched the butterflies and the far clouds.

But presently I heard a tearing, rending sound, and, looking, saw a small, black figure out in the sunshine, bending over a choked path, half hidden herself in the invading poppies.

Madame Revaliere had never had her husband's instinct to cultivate and civilise ; she was not a gardener. . . . I went to see what she was doing with such energy and determination.

I shall never forget her white face above the crimson poppies or her set lips ; her eyes, dark and stabbing with resentment ; her stained hands, and round her the little patch of broken, fading flowers that scarcely showed in that bright wilderness of colour.

"His garden," was all those lips said to me, but I saw how it was—she was trying to stem the law of oblivion, so she tore at those weeds, and her frail hands were possessed with the frenzy of despair.

. . . I suppose the first men, seeing that Nature conspired against them, evolved the idea of burying places, and we still keep them, our oldest tradition.

This year, staying with my friend again, I made with her another pilgrimage, carrying a pot of lilies in blossom to the country where M. Revaliere lies buried.

A small French town of narrow houses, shuttered

and pointed, ornamented with coloured tiles ; cobble-stoned streets mounting up and down between orchards in blossom, and an old church with gargoyle necks craning out in their long watch over the cemetery. It must have been a sad walk for a widow. She went hurriedly, bearing the lilies, looking down on the road ; the summer wind stirred and filled out her black veil, dust whitened the hem of her dress.

Having come to the graveyard we were all silent.

* * * * *

I had never seen a French cemetery before ; how cold ours in England must seem to them. Every tombstone was smothered in wreaths of beaded flowers, tiny glass beads strung on wire in form of petals, mounted on huge frames of lacework, made of beads, blue and yellow, black and white, grey, mauve, and more sombre colours. Perhaps the Frenchman would try and hide the rigid lines of Death—perhaps, with his quicker instincts, he piles his graves with sentiment, to keep warm the last sleep of the bones laid beneath them.

Looking over the whole, it seemed as if a huge storm of blackened, tempest-stricken leaves had been hurled down on the gravestones.

This piece of ground enclosed with walls, silent in the midst of life, had an air of arrested nature ; the plough must spare it, the law of progression—flower and bud, fresh blossom over the fallen petal—must circle round it ; here, man had bowed his head to the unknown in death, to preserve to posterity the memory of himself.

My friend dug in silence and planted her lilies ;

a bust of M. Revaliere looked over her head with sightless eyes . . . When she had finished she stood a minute with her hands clasped. We bowed our heads.

A strange moment. Did he come to her out of his narrow grave ? What was left of him there ? Only memory ?

Did he brush her cheek in the light wind passing ? Play with her hair as he was used to do ?

Her face was lowered and there were tears on it.

Out in the fields and on the hills a summer gale stirred the long grass, and all the leaves rustled and pushed each other.

It is only man that has built cemeteries . . .
Man remembers.

XXXI

A DAY IN THE COUNTRY

MOTHER PERRIN, the students' charwoman in the Rue des Chats, wanted to see the country again. She had not been there since she was twelve ; it lay dimly in her memory—a green place, with a faint gold haze over it—whether of childhood or buttercups she could not tell.

She was fifty now ; the hard-working years of her life had passed in continual coming and going, climbing stairs, scrubbing attics, bargaining, scolding—another one of the restless crowd who make eternal fever in the heart of a great city.

How this desire came to her—whether at night, on her tumbled bed, with a sigh of tiredness and some strange uncomprehended longing ; or whether it was the sight of leaves on the trees in the Boulevard St. Michel—who can say ?

Spring comes suddenly in Paris ; for long months it has been winter, and then, one day we have a lively feeling, gay and sad, stirring the heart—we look up and discover the leaves.

An artist, for whom she worked in a little back street of the Quartier Latin, sold his first picture, and, in a fit of drunken ecstasy, flung a five-franc piece at her head. She had bitten the coin, tapped it, then hidden it in her dirty blouse—and the

vision had materialised : a day in the country. Her husband spat on the floor when she told him ; Charlot, their little boy, heard with wonder. His mother kissed him that night when she put him to bed ; she sighed, and looked round the kitchen so queerly, and kept smoothing her apron with her big, red hands and murmuring :

“ Ah ! the good moments one has passed in the country ! In the country, my Charlot—there where it is cool and green, and no houses, and no roads—ah ! the good moments ! ”

For a week before she began preparing, mending their clothes, filling the big, black bag that was to carry their provisions ; a loose, shabby bag, made of thick serge, with a draw-string. Scraps were saved from their meals ; Charlot picked up two sous and they bought oranges—if one was going to be happy one must eat.

Her husband, sitting in his corner by the stove, would turn a bleared eye towards the packages in the bag, mumbling and chewing his lips the while—a bent old man, whose features were gradually becoming obliterated in a grey dust of dirt and misery ; a few hairs bristled on his chin, his knotted fingers moved spasmodically—used all day to pulling the string of a mechanical toy. Patient, and cringing, he sold little noises like cocks and hens to students passing the Musée de Cluny.

He would stare at this bag, and Charlot would move round it, and pat it, and stroke it. Mother Perrin, resting her arms on the sink, would turn her head.

“ We shall have a good holiday,” she would say.

And the buttercups became more real than the bread she was preparing

On Easter Monday Charlot was washed and brushed and his best plaid socks put on, with his new suit that they had bought so cheaply from the old clothes man at the corner ; and he found himself clinging to his mother's skirts when they went down the steps of the underground railway. His father followed more reluctantly, and kept grumbling to them not to go so fast, glancing dubiously at his wife's broad back and then at the bag when he would quicken his shuffling steps. Born on the pavements, playing in the gutter, he had never been out of Paris.

It was a general holiday ; the platform was full of people. Mother Perrin, ruddy and robust, pummelled her way to the front. She was the bread-winner, with the sharpest tongue and the greatest lung power—if it came to shouting ; she had borne the expenses of life on her shoulders, and they were muscular.

She smiled, wiping her forehead ; Charlot, standing on tip-toe, trying to peep round her, kept whispering :

“ Pa-pa—there’s oranges in the bag ! And there’s gingerbread ; *maman* bought it for me, because we’re going to the country . . .” The opening of the bag gave a magnificent lustre to those green fields his mother talked of.

His father only shook his grey head to get rid of a far-away grumbling sound down the dark tunnel that clung round his ears.

A whistle in the distance that was like the shriek

of a wild animal, and with that sound the crowd began to rock, as though each one braced his muscles to spring. With a roar and a flash of lights their train shot into the station. There was a deafening hiss of escaping steam, a click when the doors flew apart, and a flood of men and women poured on to the platform, overflowed and trampled the crowd fighting to get in. It was a confusion of hot, panting bodies, struggling limbs, intermixed head-gear . . .

Mother Perrin's black eyes, quick to note advantage, spotted a place. Standing firmly on the platform, perspiring, triumphant, she lifted the heavy bag and swung it in. There came a series of sharp metallic sounds along the train, like echoes of one blow ; a harassed official put his hand on her chest and forced her backwards. The doors banged in her face. And with a rush of tepid wind the train was gone. "My bag !" she screamed, shaking her fists.

"Stand back there, stand back ! . . ."

Mother Perrin turned away, masked again in the sullen apathy with which she got up so early every morning and came home so late each night ; but her little dark eyes burned with the unappeasable fury of one who has been cheated.

Her husband passed a trembling finger over his chin. "Then we aren't going ?" he asked.

"What's the good, since we've lost the food ?"

His face seemed clearer, reassured ; he was going back to the pavements he knew, the noises, the sights, the smells. But Charlot, suddenly realising that all the oranges, the gingerbread, and the barley sugar had rushed away for ever down that dark, dark tunnel—began to cry bitterly.

XXXII

SPRING IN THE GARDENS

IN the very heart of the Quartier Latin there is a garden set round with trees ; it is full of statues and fountains, and a marble pool from which a column of water soars twenty feet into the air.

The town is busy outside, full of noise, and restless. When the sun shines in April men still hurry to and fro, ring their bells and blow their horns, grind the wheels of their machinery upon the cobblestones. Traffic and commerce may not cease for a moment, but here and there—a man or woman slips into the garden.

There is a satyr dancing at one gate, high up above a flower bed, where the first tulips have opened this morning, red and gold. He has one blackened arm stretched out to the traffic, as though saying: “Hush ! For shame !”

With the other he holds a rude pipe to his lips that are laughing. He seems to dance for joy of these first tulips, to mock the town beyond the railings : poised on one toe, he will shout and leap.

Watching with him, on the other side, is a marble youth sitting with his foot upon a lyre ; he is facing out over the garden, and he is still. What is he gazing at so profoundly with his cheek on his hand ? He has his back to the streets ; from eternal silent

watching over the green grass he has learnt repose—but he seems a seer with his vision this morning.

Between the trees, down the gravel walk, there is a stone balustrade, and all the Queens of France, proud, with their robes girt round them ; a low bank of turf, and then the broad, hidden circle, with its young lilac and its pool of water, the heart of the garden, at which all the statues gaze. Is it that the sun smiling on bare branches through the blown spray of the fountain has clothed them with a mirage ?

This is the moment that the marble watcher at the gate has seen, this it is that has caused the satyr to pipe so gay :

It is spring ! And the first tender leaves, and blue shadows below them, and white clouds in a clear sky, and the songs of birds ; life everywhere, even among the statues. A naked youth stands on a column with a drawn sword in his hand, point downwards ; he has lowered it, surely ? Nothing can die this morning. He is staring at the fountain that seems flung into the air by a divine impulse of all the garden. A large bird rests on his head, grey, like the stone of his face, but when first it slowly moves its neck—one is not surprised ; if the youth flung away his sword and stepped down to drink and bathe in the water it would be natural, the stately Queens of France would nod their heads !

At one side of the garden, away among the trees, a glimpse of ivy and a sound of water beckons ; there are pigeons cooing. . . . This is the “Fountain de Medicis” ; here, down this bank of green, between the plane trees looped with double row of ivy—

watching over the long stone trough of water, lie Acis and Galatea—immortal love! And all the fountain drips silver lace over the moss-green steps beneath them, and the sun lies amber in their shallow pool.

This great monument of pillars and wreaths, crouching demi-gods, with their stone vases pouring out stone floods, stony fruits and flowers that never fall, is blackened with age. Galatea alone stays fair and white, lying low down near the living water upon the knees of Acis, with her face turned up to his.

All these long years Acis has never raised his head, charmed with gazing into those eyes that seek his own. He has reclined like that upon one arm, his pipe of reed neglected, slipping from his fingers ; and braced on his thigh that lovely form, with rounded breast, languorous arms and almost living limbs. Ivy has grown up, a bower behind them ; with one foot set in it and one knee bent on the rock above their heads—the huge, towering figure of Polyphemus—with his shaggy hair in furious curls and his hand stretched out, his garment blowing off him like a whirlwind—stoops over to destroy. He is blackened and stained with the breath of furnaces.

A fawn and a wood nymph start forward from between their columns, but Acis never heeds them. To die thus, at one stroke, with his beloved, were death made sweet.

Polyphemus has crouched there a long time—has he forgotten ? The sparrows think he has ; they bathe all day long at the edge of the broad steps,

fluttering their grey breasts in the water; and below them, in the deeper tank, goldfish sleep and float on a green liquid that seems older than the blackened stonework of the fountain.

Polyphemus stoops like winter, but he has been chained and snared by spring.

XXXIII

A PARISIAN EVENING

I HAD never been to Montmartre. Mlle. Josephine Rogier, “Fifine,” a dependant of the friends with whom I was staying, offered to escort me.

Fifine is very poor, very good company, and has a kind heart; her clothes are cheap, but she knows how to put them on. Her figure is excellent, so is her appetite. Her face is flat and broad, covered with a thick, putty-coloured skin; her small, bright-brown eyes, with a mischievous red light in them, become narrow slits when she laughs; she has little white teeth and pale lips, an inclination towards a double chin, and light, sandy-coloured hair that is parted at one side and brought down in a loop in the middle of her forehead.

She invited a cousin, a youth of nineteen, to come with us. We left home at half-past nine and walked towards Montmartre; it had just left off raining and was fresh and cool. We seemed with one step to cross a boundary, from the dark wet trees and the arc lamps of the boulevard which I knew to a long winding river of lights where everything was motion and glare and colour. No solitary figures at marble-topped tables beneath striped awnings, but streams of men and women passing in and out of tavern doorways, all laughing, and pushing, and jostling.

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These cafés kept their treasures hidden, but each flaring, smoke-wreathed opening was a candle to a crowd of fluttering moths. There were theatres, in front of which the road was blocked with motor cars ; men strained their necks and backs to catch the arch of a foot in a satin slipper, the swish of a skirt, passing like flashlight pictures in endless procession as each lady sprang from her carriage and disappeared among the crowd in the vestibule. Nothing was quiet here, not even the blank faces of the high buildings ; letters would start out upon them, red, and yellow, and green—"Chocolat Menier," "Bijoux Fixe," and even "Sunlight Savon"—reflected far out into the wet road in crimson zigzags. Across the soft blackness of the sky, as though in defiance of its stillness, moved the red sails of the "Moulin Rouge," a mill outlined in electric light, with a shadowy miller at one high window, his wife at the other, and far above, an apricot moon, several stars, and—the comet. A sound of violins came out to us, thin and shrill.

"Hold your purse tight here!" whispered Fifine. We passed into the door of the "Chat Noir."

This was a long narrow cabin, lined with high-backed wooden seats ; above them caricatures of all the celebrities of the day, surmounted by a line of black cats chasing each other over blue grass. The chairs and tables were ranged like pews in a church, with a central aisle. Young Marcel ordered beer for himself and Fifine, and took off his overcoat, an English one, of which he was very proud, but which looked like a baggy dressing-gown on his

small frame. At the end, facing us, was an old mantelpiece with brass candlesticks and copper lanterns on it ; underneath, in place of a grate, was a piano, with a step at one side where the reciter stood ; an iron stairway led to this, and beyond, one could see an untidy red-checked curtain looped up above hats and coats. On the left of the piano was a sort of bar, where a pale-faced, dark-eyed girl presided. A youth in a cocked hat and blue overall had just finished his turn when we sat down, and the waiter, a magnificent specimen of savagery with a peony-coloured face and fierce moustache and a heavy brass chain and medallion round his neck, planted our beer down and whisked up three empty glasses with one brusque movement. Marcel began to smile ; he is sallow, with a very young moustache, a turned-up nose, and fine eyes.

The second performer began ; he was a comedian with a light, roving eye that made game of everything, and an insolent tongue which cut every one. His lower lip projected when he took a low note. It was a song accompanied by action ; if it had been Chinese no one could have failed to understand it. Frenchmen have genius for expressing the inexpressible ; their gestures are like flashlights on their thoughts. And how the audience roared ! Marcel's lips opened wider and wider ; I caught the gleam of a tickled cat in Fifine's eyes.

This was followed by a different type of singer altogether. A heavy, red-faced, clean-shaven man, with thick, raven-black hair and black eyes that seemed full of the devil—of fatigue, too, and irony. He was handsome in a saturnine way, but his face

was marked by dissipation ; there was something animal and heavy in it ; only the eyes were bright like quick black points, and one wondered if they ever could rest. He had the remains of a fine voice that had been well trained, and he carried the room along with him by reason of the fullness and sweetness of his notes. I wondered what he had trained for, from what fallen. In his curt bow he seemed to brush aside his auditors' applause.

Number four sang indecent songs with a sort of astonished gravity on his pale face. He wore pince-nez and was going bald, had a drooping moustache and a crooked mouth—he used no gestures, but I gathered that his songs were very comic. I could feel Marcel hugging himself in a sort of ecstasy, and Fifine was pouting, but her eyes grew brighter and brighter. A band of artists now tramped into the room, shaking the old lanterns and candle-snuffers ; pale, thin young men, with long noses and lank, long hair, slouch hats, and neckties tied in a great bunch under one ear. And this was their haven—where they come every night, rejoicing themselves with cheap cigars, with the hot, heavy fumes of beer in their heads. And is it from this they will draw inspiration ? The artist will tell you that it is necessary—smoke, and wine, and women ; cerebral excitement.

A thin little man in brown checks got up and recited ; he had practically no forehead, but a sweep of wet brown hair. He gave us something funny as though it were something pretty—with a stage smile and his eyebrows raised out of sight. He was followed by the barmaid, who cast off her

weary, jaded look for a leering smile that revealed all her perfect teeth ; she sang in a high-pitched tremolo, rather through her nose, and every one applauded her with vigour and enthusiasm.

"We must go," whispered Fifine, "it's past eleven now, and there are other things——" As we passed out the hook-nosed comedian made some remark about us that set the room in a roar.

We crossed the road to the "Infernal Regions," advertised by the lurid mouth of a red grotto. Here more beer was drunk, but I believe it was very nasty ; it looked thick and muddy, full of odds and ends. The tables were lit from underneath, and we sat in a dull glow coming from the rocky walls where serpents hung, and, when anybody pressed a secret button, waved their heads. Devils waited on us ; his Satanic Majesty himself, a huge, hook-nosed, black-haired man in crimson satin slashed with silver, marched up and down the middle. We were led to an inner room, where we sat on gridirons with very warm-looking flames below, and were told we should see the sins of the world. Then all was darkness, and a little whisper of excitement passed over the audience. A languorous, rosy light, that made me think of the Venus grotto in *Tannhäuser*, was suddenly turned on to a stage, where three very pink-looking women in tights were admiring themselves in hand-mirrors. This was "Vanity." They were still as statues, and so soft and waxlike, but when it was dark again one heard them bounding about on the loose boards. It was hot and close ; the room seemed full of quick breathing.

When we stepped out into the fresh night again the wind rushed round our faces and into our eyes, as though to sweep away the reflections of that rosy glow.

We stood on the bridge of Montmartre, with its hurrying stream of men and women, its traffic and lights, and sounds of bells ; and underneath, quiet and pale, the old cemetery, where white crosses and grey tombs grow out of the shadows like ghosts. Nothing moved there ; no music, no rush of feet, no one stopped to look. The shafts of light from the café doorways beckoned us always further down the road.

With a rush of foetid air in our nostrils we went down into the metropolitan railways. A man in evening dress, enjoying Paris, like ourselves, wedged in close to Fifine, and lounged with his shoulder on hers ; his hand stole out, too. With an agile little movement she stooped as though to tie her shoe ; when she drew herself back the man cried "*Quel diable !*" and shrank away, with a long wet scratch on the back of his hand from the hatpin held in hers. "Pardon," she said lightly, and seemed to purr and crouch as a cat crouches after it has sprung. The man got out at the next station !

Straining on tiptoe at the back of an enormous crowd, we saw the "*sortie de l'opéra*." A French-woman's face is nothing to her, all her triumph lies in the possession of her body ; she expects to be stared at, she reveals its lines in all her choice of dress, she holds it proudly, she is never afraid of a bold curve.

We entered a café ; they were all packed now,

at midnight. Fifine ordered sausages and pickled cabbage, pineapples in liqueur, and tankards of foaming beer. At a table opposite there was a woman who, in her bold self-confidence, her vitality, her superb, rejoicing body, attracted the attention of every man in the room. She was not actually beautiful, but there was an assumption of beauty which easily blinded youths as young as Marcel. She seemed to be drawing the poor boy's eyes out of his head. At her table, which was close against the wall, was a stout gentleman with a flushed, rolling neck, and a middle-aged man facing her, who had a bald patch, a fair, drooping moustache, and a pale, inexpressibly disagreeable face. He seemed to be feasting on her splendid proportions, running his eyes over her as a horse dealer notes the points of a fine animal, and his fawning, yet brutal expression, was one of self-congratulation. She wore a large picture hat, a black satin *écharpe*, that is, a wide, plain scarf, folded tightly about the figure and ending in two little gathered points with hanging balls. Her dress was low-cut, and her careless eyes seemed making game of every one they encountered —brown eyes, quick as a bird's, full of life, devilry, and of a sort of challenge—fascinating eyes that, having once encountered, one thirsted to meet again; they put one down so coolly, with such insolent belief in their own power. Marcel tried to drown himself in his beer, but even with the last drop, over the rim of his pewter mug he was staring at her.

We couldn't hear their talk. The stout man had a proprietary air; he was evidently paying, and

beamed as if the sun were shining on him. The pale, dissipated gentleman was more ingratiating, he seemed trying to slide into favour ; but the woman, leaning back on the red velvet seat, was so sure, so strong in the prime of her beauty, that she yawned in his face and stared over his head, and—by the end of their supper had him struggling like a fish upon ice !

Passing us, they strolled out to the crowd on the pavement ; she flicked Marcel with the end of her scarf, which swung out in a sort of natural gracefulness. There was a strong scent of musk, or *tréfle incarnat*. Marcel's forehead shone with perspiration. Fifine, growing sleepy, was looking a little cross. The café was still full of people, but it seemed empty. We suddenly felt that we had tasted the full flavour of our Parisian evening, and we, too, passed out to the dark streets.

XXXIV

UNFORTUNATE

MONSIEUR DUBOIS is a little man with a sloping forehead, pale brown eyes, rather round and anxious-looking, fierce eyebrows, a hook nose, a thin, drooping moustache, grey, like the irritable shock of hair brushed back from his brow, in profile resembling a cockatoo's comb. He has the yellowish skin of a man in ill-health, and in his face deep lines that, in repose, seem finger-marks of care, and when he laughs, the very crow's-feet of good-fellowship. Sometimes, in his old, faded dressing-gown, he appears a rather feeble, pitiable figure of an old man ; twenty-four hours later, at somebody's dinner table, when good wine has flowed between his lips, he will be the merriest, the youngest, and the noisiest in the room ! But most often he is just an ordinary husband and father of a numerous family, with that anxious, abstracted eye and a rather sad line round his mouth. He is a musician, and ekes out existence giving lessons on the violin.

One Sunday morning in July the rain was falling as usual on the pink roses climbing over the front of the little villa in one of the old suburbs of Paris. His garden, a long strip at the back, was a quiet, dripping wilderness of green, with here and there a foxglove or a hollyhock ; strawberries rotted in the

damp among their wet leaves ; cherries went mouldy before they could be picked ; from behind a bower of chestnuts came the humming of his bees. He himself, in a blue-and-white striped flannelette suit that looked like an Englishman's pyjamas, had been up since six, and all the time thin, uncertain violin notes had been feeling their way through the heavy damp of the garden. Only when he took the bow himself, and his grey hair flew up on end, the notes, vibrating with a shrill, sharp authority, cut through the window and penetrated into the darkest corner of that screen of leaves—then the cat would wake uneasily and slip round the corner of the house.

Madame Dubois, in a shabby little *peignoir*, was already in her kitchen, a small, delicate woman, sallow, with thin lips and dark eyes, lack-lustre, mouse-coloured hair, that she was always too busy to arrange to advantage. M. Dubois had married above himself.

The smell of hot coffee steamed out. Louisette, their daughter, spread a tumbled cloth over one half of the table, and, without hurry, took a brown loaf a yard long and began to cut it. Two plump little boys in socks and short breeches—her brothers—came tumbling in from the garden, where they had been striding about on stilts.

There was a wooden clock on the dining-room wall, with heavy brass weights—it was silent ; nothing marked time in the dim tranquillity of that sparsely furnished room, with its polished floor, heavy chairs, long French windows, shuttered (on account of the heat last year), its folding doors

into the drawing-room, and its glimpse down the passage into the quiet green depths of the garden. Louisette had dusted the black marble mantelpiece, moved the loose papers and the empty purple ink-bottle ; Maurice, the baby, aged six, had climbed on a chair and was dipping his fingers in the sieve where some honeycomb had been left to drain, when—the bell on the garden gate jangled, hurried steps could be heard, the tranquillity of the silent leaves that met and embraced each other across the path was rudely broken by a tall, thin man in a black coat, who came running up the steps, his yellow face contracted with emotion, his hair in disorder, his thin lips quivering, and an unbuttoned, distracted air that was strangely disturbing in a figure usually as upright and rigid as a tailor's advertisement.

“Hullo ! Here’s Uncle Ernest !” called Pierre, the second little boy.

Louisette turned, without haste, from her dusting, lifting her cheek to be kissed. Madame Dubois rose from the table to greet her sister’s husband. He stopped in the passage, stared as though seeing nothing, then, at a sweet, high note with a quaver in it, drawn from the string of M. Dubois’ violin, he flung his hands up to his ears. “Marianie is dead !” he said, in a deep, hoarse voice.

Madame Dubois stopped short with her hands raised and a smile arrested on her face. Louisette, still holding the duster, stared ; the little boys drew nearer ; from their mouths, open in astonishment, no words came ; the violin gave forth the only sound.

"Marianie," he began again, with difficulty, as though repeating something learned by heart, "I have a daughter—"

"Hullo, my dear! Good morning! Have some breakfast!" M. Dubois thrust his grey head suddenly round the door. "Eh! What?" he stammered, arrested by the expression on those faces.

"Aunt Marianie is dead, papa," whispered Jean.

Hearing his own news from other lips, spoken so glibly, seeing surprise, curiosity, shock, in the wide-open eyes all round him, but none of that empty sense of personal loss, that resentment he himself felt, the widower pushed past them, pulled open the folding doors, and flung himself down on one of the low, satin-covered chairs in the drawing-room.

Here there was quiet and shadow, the shutters were closed and the muslin curtains drawn; the bunch of mistletoe under which he had first kissed his wife still hung from the ceiling—it was yellow and faded. A host of memories began to surge round him like a dark sea in which he must struggle for ever, but could never drown. He hid his face in his hands: Marianie, plump and rosy, generous, affectionate, with her eyes like a clear pool that reflected nothing, that no shadow of speculation ever troubled, with her quiet ways, her comfortable presence—what had become of her? Where had she gone—and why? Who was left to him now? No one—nothing—except a little red-faced baby that cried continually. "My daughter," he thought. "And she will be taken, too! Ah! I am an unfortunate!"

Some one's head was thrust round the door, but he did not raise his face. "Uncle Ernest is crying ! Like this ! Shaking all over !" whispered Jean to Pierre, sitting disconsolately on the doorstep, feeling they ought not to play.

Ernest Lefevre was one of those men who are born without luck and bring misfortune to all their friends ; habitually taciturn and unprepossessing, he had not the faculty of adapting himself to his ever-shifting circumstances. He closed his mouth on an argument with an upward sweep of his chin and his lips curled down at the corners. He had a short, scanty, black moustache with square ends that had been gnawed off ; he gave his opinion in terms so measured and solemn that one asked, instinctively, "Who is he ?" and was told, "Something in an insurance office."

He had lost all his fortune, and his mind was so bent looking back at the past that he could never see how things were shaping themselves in the present. Meeting him in an almost penniless state, Dubois recognised an "unfortunate," and took him home. Here he met Marianie, Madame Dubois' elder sister, a lady already stout and past her prime, with a little money and a simple, affectionate nature. They married, and were for a year very happy. He was a widower now, with no living relative except the baby.

Déjeuner was a little late that morning. Madame Dubois had rushed off to her sister's house and presently came back carrying the child. At half-past twelve some one asked where M. Lefevre was, and, gently opening the drawing-room door, they found

him still bitterly crying. Madame Dubois brought his food into the darkened room, put her arm round his shoulder, spoke to him kindly ; he begged her to take charge of the baby herself, to trust no ordinary nurse-girl, then returned to his melancholy, remaining there till evening.

Louisette had to cook the supper ; her mother was busy arranging a little crib close to her bed and hushing the cries of the baby, which drowned the notes of the last pupil's violin.

When it was dark M. Lefevre went up to look at his child. "It's all I have left !" he said solemnly, shaking Madame Dubois' hand vigorously, as though congratulating her. "I confide my daughter to your care. I'll come round first thing in the morning !" "Poor Ernest ! But what can one do ?" cried M. Dubois at supper, throwing his hands up and opening his eyes very wide.

"I always told Marianie——" Madame Dubois tried to stop her tears, but she had to leave the table. Louisette washed up, instead of studying for the examination for which she was preparing ; the little boys slipped out to the garden.

M. Dubois stood fidgeting from one slippers foot to the other. "What's the poor devil doing ? I ought to go round," he thought. "But—can one do anything ?"

Like a lost spirit, in his pale blue flannelette suit, he wandered into the drawing-room and sat down to the piano ; his fingers strayed aimlessly, he pressed the soft pedal, pursed his lips, stared up at the wall. His heart was very full of his friend's misfortune, but Ernest's tears, his hard, struggling fits

of sobbing, were more than tired nerves could bear. Unconsciously he began to use the other pedal ; presently he was playing Beethoven.

His wife came in with a candle two hours later ; she was undressed, and her face and neck seemed thinner and more worn ; her nightgown was unbuttoned at the throat and a limp frill fell on her chest. "Do you know it's past eleven ? You'll wake the baby ! You've left us to do everything, and there are the boys never gone to bed, and you play the piano—and there's poor Ernest——"

"Yes, exactly ! I can't forget him ! Poor Ernest !" M. Dubois sighed. "He'd better come here to meals——"

"Well, but I shall have enough to do, with his child on my hands ! "

"Come, come ! We can't let him eat there—alone——"

The house grew quiet. Lying on his back, staring at the shadows, M. Dubois' eyes were full of their peculiar anxious sadness ; he wondered what Lefevre was doing ; it might have happened to himself. His own wife had never seemed so precious. Presently he fell asleep, and was gently snoring when he was awakened by a thin, complaining cry, utterly disturbing, fretful, unreasoning. The bed creaked, his wife was leaning over the crib ; he heard her whispering : "Hush ! hush !" and was vexed that she had been waked. Then the thought crossed his mind—"Poor Ernest ! Poor child !" He got up, lit the candle, and moved about like a grey moth, fetching things that were needed.

At seven o'clock in the morning Lefevre came round, buttoned up tight in his long black coat, his mouth firmly shut, with corners turned down and a little pouch underneath on either side, his eyes tired and pale.

Madame Dubois hurriedly took out some curling pins, while her husband, grasping him warmly by the hand, brought him in "without ceremony" to see his daughter.

For a long time he stood, with his lower lips gradually projecting, his head sunk on his chest, staring at the baby, with its flabby, unhealthy cheeks and a head that rolled slightly, with half-closed eyes, as though it had not life-force enough to open or shut them.

"I must have it weighed again!" he said presently. "How did she sleep?"

"Oh, passably! passably!"

"Have you good ventilation in this room?"

"Come, now! It's my own room! What do you suppose?"

"The crib's in a draught there——"

"Ah! my poor fellow, leave the child! Louisette has been up since five; she has made us an excellent omelette. Come——"

Louisette was eighteen; she had her father's soft brown eyes, but without their expression. Hers were clear, and, as yet, unawakened; her cheeks were round and rosy as a peach, her little nose turned up; in the set of her lips, that were usually smiling, there was something determined; she had small, white, very even teeth and long brown hair that she plaited and coiled round her head, so that

it seemed almost too heavy for her slender neck ; there were red lights in it in the sunshine, in shadow it was dull.

During the days that followed Madame Dubois was obliged to give up her housekeeping and hand over almost the whole of her cooking to her daughter. M. Lefevre sat at the table like a black monument of his own grief, never smiling, never opening his lips except to make some statement about the bringing-up of babies and the health of his own in particular. He was a heavy weight on the family life, causing the little boys to whisper their jokes and laugh at each other under the tablecloth.

M. Dubois would stare at him, and then away, with a sort of shame ; order a bottle of wine, try to look melancholy, too, but with an unreasoning longing to slap his brother-in-law on the back and tell him to drink a good glass and get over it.

Louisette's cheeks were as round and rosy as ever, but her neck, in her little, low-yoked, black frock, grew thinner. She was getting up at four o'clock now to study.

The widower had one gnawing irritation—he could not afford to buy a cow for the special nourishment of his baby. He had quarrelled already with three milkmen. Madame Dubois' time was completely engrossed ; it took twenty minutes to give the child its bottle, following the methods selected by its father ; it was fed every two hours, it was weighed every morning. He had a little leather-covered note-book, divided into days and weeks, each page headed : " My daughter—Jeanne Marie-Louise Lefevre—her weight." If it was an

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ounce below the average his lips turned down, his eyes became like a startled fish's, he went about with the funeral air of an undertaker, silent, taciturn. M. Dubois, seeing him from the window of the music-room, would sweep his bow across the strings, shrug his shoulders, sigh, and muttering "Poor unfortunate!" stamp his foot, and begin shouting at his pupil with quite unusual exasperation.

Meeting Louisette one day walking up and down the path giving the baby its airing, Lefevre stopped, telling her not to walk under the trees, that shade was unhealthy—the damp from the grass. The child, waking, had begun to cry : Louisette jogged it up and down—her tired feet ached, her books indoors seemed calling to her, there was only a week before the examination. Her cheeks flamed, tears started to her eyes. "Take and nurse the precious infant yourself!" was on the tip of her tongue.

"Oh ! he enrages me !" she cried to her mother, when they were washing up that evening. But Madame Dubois was silent, with her arms resting on the side of the sink she had fallen asleep.

Lefevre was a cold-blooded man who detested damp : just to go across to his own house he enveloped himself in a huge black capuchon ; he loaded his daughter with shawls and veils.

He insisted on seeing the child bathed every day and took the temperature of the water, which had to be so hot that Madame Dubois used to wring her hands and scream at him in the shrill nasal voice which she always broke into when particularly exasperated. It was the heat he himself liked. "It's

fortifying ! ” he declared. “ I have read in such-and-such a book—”

“ But, heavens ! I’m a mother ! Do you mean to tell me you know more about babies than I do ? ”

“ Madame, hot water has certain medicinal properties—”

“ Here ! take the bath—I won’t be responsible ! ” Then, her quick woman’s instinct touched for the sake of the child, seeing it held awkwardly in a man’s clumsy hands, she swallowed her wrath and snatched it away from him. Embittered, offended, he refused to speak to any of the family for twenty-four hours. . . .

Alone with his baby he would sit and gaze at its puffed red cheeks, saying to himself : “ It looks well—it is fat.” His melancholy eyes would fasten on the dimple in its chin—he had one in his own—and he would feel a faint squeeze at his heart, thinking : “ My daughter ! ” He avoided seeing its tiny, fretting hands, so thin that they were only skin and bone ; he avoided touching its face and feeling the flabby softness of its unnaturally swollen cheeks ; but he would watch for it to open its eyes, whispering “ Marianie,” and his own became dim and were filled with tears.

The baby was born with a sore place on its body, which was like a personal affront to its father ; every morning M. Dubois would inquire how it was healing. “ An accident—an accident ! The child is perfectly healthy ! ” his brother-in-law would answer scowling. He insisted on its being dressed with cotton wool, which inflamed and irritated it. If any one suggested that it was a natural blemish

a dark flush stole into his cheeks and he spoke in a thin, sharp-sounding voice as though his lips were acid.

One of those hot, steamy days that come after summer rain found Madame Dubois at the end of her strength ; her own baby—a round, sunburnt picture of a child, with black eyes like soft wild berries and solemn, yet smiling, lips, that seemed considering life and expecting only good—she had been obliged to send to school, having no time to attend to him ; but she had felt a pang, seeing him so proud of his inky fingers !

All the windows and doors were open, but no air came in, only a heated vapour that seemed drawing out one's strength just as it had sucked up the moisture from the garden.

Louisette came into her father's music-room. " Listen ! I must speak. Mother is done up—her legs are trembling——"

" What can I do ? " cried M. Dubois irritably.

" Send her to bed ! She has been up three nights walking about with that child ! You must send it away ; let him get a nurse. He never says ' Thank you ! ' The sight of his face turns the milk sour ! I hate him ! He told me I didn't wash its bottle clean. . . . And I was sorry for that baby once ! "

The music-room was the one dusty, untidy place in the little French villa ; old stringless violins hung on the wall, broken bows, broken music stands stood in the corners, there were jars of honey on the floor, wooden sabots, and a tall cage where snails were left to fatten on fine white flour and bread.

M. Dubois ran his fingers through his hair, bending his head to watch a bee that was caught under a bit of green netting. "Come, now," he began in a grumbling voice, "what's the use of talking to me? Can't I see that your mother's worn out? But its life is in her hands!"

"And mine! I've had it all day."

"Well, but—poor fellow—what's he saying to Jean and Pierre?"

Louisette leant out of the window and listened; a tall, black figure could be seen with its arms folded behind its back, its head thrust forward and nose jutting out. Louisette turned, laughing a little maliciously.

"He's telling them not to lean over the baby—that it might catch some infection!"

M. Dubois bristled up. "Nonsense! My own sons! Infection! He's out of his mind! And there's my bedroom—that hardly belongs to me now—"

M. Lefevre was coming up the path; he stopped at the window. "And how's the child?" his friend asked sarcastically.

He shook his head, compressing his lips. "It has gained," he announced in a deep voice. "It is going on so well that I fear a relapse," and he gazed at the gravel.

M. Dubois burst into exasperated laughter.

"That's good! Going on so well! And here's Louisette quite worn to a shadow, and her exam. to-morrow; you don't ask how she has managed to cook, and clean, and act nurse—"

His brother-in-law bowed; a smile seemed to

break with difficulty over his face. " You have my sympathies," he said. " What finer avocation——"

Louisette wrenched herself away from him, bounced out of the room and banged the door.

M. Dubois stood biting his nails. " The devil ! And can this go on ? " he thought.

" Supper's ready ! " sounded his wife's shrill voice ; she passed into the dining-room in front of him carrying the soup tureen, and began ladling out the pale, watery-looking *bouillon* with its floating crusts of bread.

Every one was silent save M. Dubois, who talked and laughed unceasingly, with unnatural fervour, trying to ward off for another evening the heavy explosive cloud that hung about them.

Louisette kept her eyes on her plate, her cheeks were burning ; the light of their one small lamp, with its crooked shade, was unkind to the hollows and sharp prominences of her mother's face ; her father seemed older, more tired, more grey ; M. Lefevre maintained his usual silence.

The sun had sunk without any rosy light ; there was a look of sorrow about the burdened trees, whose leaves lay thick on each other like a curtain above the wilderness of garden.

Louisette pushed her plate away, upsetting a tumbler which her mother caught with the quick movement of one whose nerves are strained to the utmost.

Lefevre's head dropped a little, his face looked sad. Feeling contrition, M. Dubois turned to his brother-in-law.

"Have some wine," he said genially, holding out the bottle. "Come, come."

"Thanks." Then turning with an aggrieved air to his hostess : "You cook your meat in *graisse de koko*. I can't digest that!" *Graisse de koko* is an economy for butter, a thing not mentioned in a self-respecting family.

Madame Dubois' little dark eyes seemed to cut like knives, her voice rose acid, shrill. "If he didn't like her housekeeping he could eat somewhere else. If what was good enough for them was not good enough for him—he could go and do the other thing ; if—"

Her husband tried to stop her, to turn it into a joke, frowning dreadfully with his bushy eyebrows.

"Be quiet!" he whispered. "For heaven's sake! He'll take offence. You know what the doctor said this morning."

Madame Dubois snatched the dish of meat and whisked out of the room. A puff of tepid wind made the lamp flare on the widower's eyebrows, raised to the roots of his hair. M. Dubois' eyes strayed furtively to the door. The storm had come at last!

A door banged; there was the sound of china smashing, of a heavy fall and a little startled cry, like the sighing that had sprung up amongst the leaves. M. Dubois ran to the passage; his knees were shaking, his collar soaked with perspiration; his mind seemed suddenly a blank hole where unthinkable images, grotesque and tragic, chased with the speed of an express train. Something was

thumping in his chest. It was Louisette who turned the handle.

Face downwards on the kitchen floor lay Madame Dubois ; a frying-pan had dropped from her nerveless fingers, the half-mixed omelette was splashed on the stove and dresser, the soup tureen in fragments at her feet.

All was confusion : the one tired screw that had held the household together had given way. Tears rained down Louisette's round cheeks while she helped her father carry her mother upstairs.

When Madame Dubois revived she was too weak to lift her hand. The doctor said : "Complete breakdown—seaside—rest for six weeks."

"What about the child ?" asked M. Dubois.

The doctor threw up his hands and shrugged his shoulders. "As I told you this morning, the less it sees of its father the better. That unfortunate man would kill it in a fortnight !"

Madame Dubois' dark eyes softened ; she was feeling that boundless gentleness which comes when, after a long, silent struggle, one's family suddenly shows concern for one's welfare. "We must try——" she was beginning.

The obstinate, wooden-looking head and long yellow face of her brother-in-law loomed in the circle of the candle-light.

"I am sorry, but I have felt it my duty to take my daughter from you—it might be something catching. Good-night—thanks—let me know if there's infection !" And pressing M. Dubois' hand in his cold, stiff fingers, he went. They could hear him stumbling on the stairs, hurrying through the

passage, running down the road to his empty house.

“Poor unfortunate!” muttered M. Dubois.

The doctor wrinkled his forehead and made a pouting motion with his lips.

“A fortnight?” he said. “Three days! . . .”

XXXV

PARIS ON THE FOURTEENTH OF JULY

THE fourteenth breaks in mists and cloud, but before the first streak of light a column of people are pushing their way out to Longchamps to see the military review, which begins at nine o'clock. By the time the sun has sucked up all the vapours and shown his lazy, golden presence in a sky now cleared the city is full again, and the tide of the great boulevards has begun to ebb and flow.

For three days Paris has looked like a huge country fair ; merry-go-rounds are set up in every open place, stalls, switchbacks, rocking-boats ; orchestra booths, arranged by a combination of all the café proprietors—and there must be some hundreds—who pay the bandsmen to play for three days and nights. All the buildings are decorated, there is not one doorway, one shop, however small and dingy, but has its flag. Garlands hang across the streets and lines of lanterns that look like yellow pumpkins.

The grand boulevards are thronged ; every six yards a crowd is collected around some *camelot*, generally an old man playing the guitar, another the violin, and a singing woman selling copies of the song which the audience sings, too, feet and shoulders moving in time. Or else it is a man in a long yellow

coat offering in a hoarse voice to swallow lizards and serpents. He has a glass jar full of reptiles, an old umbrella, a cage of white mice. He calls out "Joseph," and a frog jumps out of his collar ; he swings a snake round his head by its tail, and cries "Shame !" on every one because the coppers don't rain down fast enough into his greasy old cap.

Further on is a grimy, half-naked man putting lighted tapers into his mouth ; and an old comedian with no front teeth and a top hat that has lost its nap. The whole length of the pavement edge there are gay stalls with roulette boards, surrounded by hedges of men ; watches, opera glasses, penknives, sweets, and hatpins are laid out as baits ; the whole is decorated with little hanging bowls of gold-fish, also given as prizes. The shops are shut, but not shuttered, and their windows are the background to this carnival. The boulevard is an ocean of gay, light-hearted people.

Flags are often a weariness to the spirit, their tawdry reds and blues are too crude seen among trees and against the sky ; paper streamers, Chinese lanterns in the sunshine, artificial roses—in their midst one can still feel bitter against life. But sorrow is banished by the sight of all these shining faces ; it is they which make this *fête* day—this great medicine brewed out of the national life, which from far and near they have come to taste.

In the afternoon it is still a Parisian crowd. Well-dressed men will slip an arm round any pretty girl they meet ; and the women wear hats like tea-cosies, market garden bouquets, turbans, bee-hives ;

but towards evening such things are swept aside like surface foam ; one misses the white faces and red lips of those figures who usually occupy the café tables—blotted out in the great ocean of “the people,” which has spread and overflowed its borders. It is the workman’s holiday ; of his wife, stout, pleasant-looking, with braided hair and no hat ; of his children ; of all the servants, shopkeepers, soldiers, country cousins. It is they who dance for three days and nights on the cobblestones, go on the merry-go-rounds and the gilt and velvet switchbacks, take flying leaps off the “rolling carpet,” clap their hands, and cheer “The Marseillaise” with a noise like triumphant waves roaring along a crumbling coast.

At night the stations and all public buildings are outlined in running jets of gas flame, with “R. F.” illuminated high above everything else on each statue, tower and dome. Red Chinese lanterns swing from the tips of the branches of each tree, like a host of midnight suns burning against the dark velvet of the sky. No two hang on the same level, and they seem to flame out of the leaves, out of the purple sapphire dusk, like poppies that have bloomed of themselves. Squibs explode, fireworks shower like waterfalls from sixth-storey windows, rosy-coloured fires burn and end in clouds of yellow smoke ; every square and side street, no matter where you go, is full of a black crowd of men and women ; they have sprung up in the night like mushrooms, and the boulevards are full to overflowing. It is a peaceful, happy crowd ; gay, but never one ill-natured word or rough gesture. At

half-past ten it moves towards the Seine. The bridges are packed ; men climb, laughing, on each others shoulders, stand on the parapets, lift up their babies, wives, sweethearts ; and the first slender rocket shoots high into the darkness, seems to faint away—then bursts into a shower of golden stars that fall and fall and vanish—almost in the waters of the Seine. There is a deep murmur through the crowd—that long “Oo !” of happy children. And now every moment the sky is lit with fireworks, zigzagging sparks which spread out like curled petals of a huge chrysanthemum, handfuls of green stars, colouring all the space round them with livid emerald, or the blue, white, red, greeted with a cheer ; thin columns soaring up and falling like sparkling water ; others that rush about and seem to knock against each other with the explosion of revolver shots ; then a deep red glow, and crackling sounds, and the prolonged sighing of delight greeting a “set picture,” only to be seen by jumping or swarming up lamp-posts.

A little to one side the moon wraps herself in a veil of clouds as though offended. What are these coloured stars flung up in her dominion ? She seems to rest a moment on the roof of the Palais de Justice, then slips down behind it.

The last bouquet spreads its million jewels, then the crowd rocks together for a moment and goes back to the streets and the merry music. At every corner now, in every square, the orchestra has started, even in the smallest alley some one will be playing the piano ; a waiter with a napkin over his arm catches hold of a housemaid—and at once

twenty couples will be dancing. They turn round each other carefully, there is no rough play ; they dance for the pleasure of dancing. It is no police-marshalled crowd, come out, open-mouthed, to gape at some celebration of an empire ; they are themselves the celebration, they are the empire. Every man is a brother that night, every man is equal. It is not a frenzied throng of patriots ready to shout and die for a cherished leader ; it is a mass of men and women who bear no ill-will to any one, who want nothing.

Liberty, Equality, Fraternity ! It is "the people's" *fête* day.

XXXVI

MADAME POTTIRAUD

My friends and I were spending a day in the country, in one of those half-deserted French gardens with high railings and an old iron gate with a broken bell, belonging to people living in Paris who never went near it.

It was a wilderness of rank grass, roses smothered by nettles, blue campanulas struggling among dock leaves, bind-weed clinging to a proud azalea with a sort of aspiring tenacity. There were currant bushes loaded with fruit that no one picked, strawberries that had gone back to wildness, moulderling, rotten potatoes, and a shadowy, vine-covered arbour.

Apple trees seemed wading up to their necks in a green sea of leaves and stalks ; the air was heavy, as though for a long time no one had moved through it ; paths were hidden.

We lay in the grass under the raspberry canes, and sometimes a ripe, red berry fell, with heavy indifference, almost into our mouths ; there were yellow ones, too, sweeter, more luscious ; but we were tired of fruit—we had eaten all we could. It was one of those delicious, dreamy hours of summer when nothing stirs, except young birch trees, that seem always thrilling with some inward delight ;

when the sun, glancing down through the leaves, tickled our faces with little warm flecks of gold, and there was a scent of flowers, and sap, and rotten wood, and the bitter smell of nettles.

A butterfly hovered over our faces, but finding that we had no honey, flew away. We began to chat, drowsy, inconsequent remarks, long pauses. A heavy, somnolent-looking dahlia, bowed by its own weight and the mystery of its velvet shadows, peered through the leaves at us ; crimson, scentless, a flower of autumn—we were all staring at it.

"What has become of Madame Pottiraud ?" one of my friends asked suddenly of the other, and a half-admiring, half-disdaining curiosity sprang into their eyes.

"Why, haven't you heard ?—She's married again !"

My hostess sat up. "Who is it this time ?"

"A musician, and he does all the housekeeping and the cooking for her. Have you seen her last visiting cards ? She has her present name—and the name of the one before across the left-hand corner. It's very convenient !"

"There's a woman who has had a strange life !"

My hostess turned to me, her lips were shut tightly, as though to belie the curiosity in her eyes.

"Who is she ?" I asked lazily, for I was more interested in the butterfly.

"She is half English, half Spanish ; she was born in Turkey, brought up in Greece, and has lived everywhere ; in nature, she is an oriental—slothful—dreamy—an idealist."

"And dirty !" interrupted the other.

"Ah, I shall never forget that season we shared a flat! It was after the singer left her, because she used to lie in bed reading all day and there was never anything for him to eat. How she cried! She used to hang over my shoulder and wring her hands—a very irritating woman, Madame Pottiraud, no balance . . . Well, I was going to tell you—she met another young man, at one of those places where she played for them to dance, and then the old story was all forgotten, she began to bloom again; but *I* saw her in the mornings! In her old dressing-gown with its greasy collar and frayed hem—just the colour of the dahlia there; and her black hair screwed up in three little plaits; and very often she hadn't washed her face! She would trail about like that all day, with some book or other. One morning the bell rang. 'It's the washerwoman, most likely—go yourself,' I said. She opened the door—oh, heavens! There was the last young man, with a bunch of roses as big as a cauliflower. They stood and gasped at each other! She is vain, you know; she tried to hide the ragged hem, but she had no stockings on—and such dreadful slippers. . . . Poor young man! He stuffed his bouquet away out of sight; he couldn't drink the coffee she made him. . . . He escaped at last, and I never saw any one tumble down the stairs at such a pace in my life. He never came again!"

"She had a mania—thought that every man who saw her was bound to fall in love with her."

"How did she come to part with her first husband?" I asked.

"She was ill; he came to see her in the hospital,

gave her some money, said goodbye, and she has never seen him since. It wounded her pride—she is very proud, you know."

My hostess raised her eyebrows—

"Yes, proud of her birth ; she comes of an old Spanish family—she won't take favours, but she will do the strangest things ! "

"Ah, she's an artist !" I thought to myself, and I asked what she was like, for I was beginning to be interested ; the drowsy profusion of the garden was not disturbed by the picture of this oriental woman.

"Well, she's tall, with blue-black hair, a sallow face, slow, heavy sort of eyes, rather a long nose—"

"The most extraordinary nose you ever saw !" broke in the other. "It positively grows longer and shorter with each adventure. Some days it seems to reach down to her chin, and her cheeks fall away, there are circles under her eyes, she looks about forty ; that's when she is in love—and it's not going right ! She will cry then—I think it is a real pleasure for her to cry ! On another day it's quite a handsome feature, and you would say she was twenty-five ! "

"Her real age ? "

"Well, every few years she finds some document that makes her younger. She was twenty-two last time I saw her !—Did you hear about M. Gautier ? It was in the 'dead season,' every one was out of Paris, and she was bored. He's a music teacher, like herself, a rather stout, florid man, with a big moustache—always joking. They were just casual friends, you know, used to give each other work

sometimes. Well, one evening she took it into her head to go and see him. They spent a pleasant hour, she came back and arranged herself on my sofa with a red cushion under her head. I had my doubts when I saw that cushion. Red's a bad sign with her ! She took her hair down and let it fall over her bare arms, and began telling me some romance she had read—not in the least as the author had written it ! She looked as young as an Italian dancer that night.

"Next morning she went to call on M. Gautier again. It was Sunday and he was just off to play the organ. She spent the rest of the day lying on my bed.

"On Monday she went again—he was giving a lesson. In the afternoon I met her going out, with a sort of still look on her face and something stirring deep down in her eyes ; she was wearing red ribbons. Would you believe it !—she went to his house (he was out again), sat down to the piano and began to practise! . . . When he came in he was furious! . . . She went every morning, as though it were the most natural thing in the world ; it was awkward for him, too, you know, a bachelor, and his pupils coming to the house. At last he told her he wouldn't have it. She began to grow thin, and her nose grew so long, but she still went.

"'I want to see him,' was all she said ! I reasoned with her ; she just stared at me with gentle compassion.

"Then he wrote to her. Ah ! the letters of Madame Pottiraud ! When M. Gautier is angry

something a little *bourgeois* peeps out in him. I fancy he asked her what sort of bringing-up she'd had, and who she was—to come and thrust herself where she wasn't wanted. The sheets and sheets she wrote him! All about her Spanish ancestors—as good as a novel. She was wounded to the quick by that remark!

“She went to bed for a week, wouldn’t bother to eat or dress; but she cried!—cried herself happy again! An extraordinary woman—no method, she would always put on a ribbon to cover a hole; and such a kind heart, so generous——”

“She was born with too lavish a nature.”

They began to speak of other things, but visions of those heavy-lidded eyes and that long, crooked nose began to possess my fancy.

We had stayed too long in the garden; clouds had spread over the sky and shut out the sun; there were no golden lights streaming through the vine leaves; everything was close and heavy, and I was suddenly tired of that lush, rank growth of weeds and grass. The raspberries were as sweet and red, but I had bitten an overripe one, and now they all seemed purple to me, with that faded, old plush look they get after rain. The broken bell gave out its metallic tinkle, instantly drowned in the silence of the garden; we stepped on to the cobblestones again.

I wanted to write about this Madame Pottiraud. I could picture very well, I thought, that spirit of *ennui*, born in the “dead season,” in the empty, weary streets—making of her its victim; but I

couldn't see her face. Sometimes I imagined something dark, with pleasure-loving almond eyes. Before I had quite realised it the wish had become necessity. I was *bound* to see it now.

My friend gave me the address, and walking out to Montmartre, I turned up one of the narrow alleys and climbed to the third floor of a dingy, unpainted-looking house, one of a long grey row staring with unblinking eyes at another opposite, as at itself in a mirror.

The door was opened by a man whom, at first glance, I took to be a crossing-sweeper. It was her husband. He showed me into a small room blocked with furniture too large for it. An old "charwoman"—I thought—in a blue print dress sat at a table covered with a dirty newspaper, on which lay the remains of their lunch. There was music open on the piano and a sort of desperate tidiness—a man's efforts to bundle things away out of sight.

There was only one bright spot of colour in the room—and that was Madame Pottiraud, who offered me a chair and sat down herself. She was not what I had pictured.

Broad black eyebrows lay like a straight band above rather prominent brown eyes; sleepy, introspective eyes, heavy-lidded, that did not pay too much attention to what they looked at; the eyes of a dreamer. My friend's words came back to me—"an idealist."

She was sallow—but this was surely one of her youthful days! The nose was irregular, but full of character; her lips had a twist in them, and seemed

not to move when she spoke. She reminded me of a Portuguese lady I know.

I told her simply what I had come for. She was flattered and coloured a little. Then I noticed that she was wearing a cotton dressing-gown covered with a pattern of large red poppies ; it was wonderfully becoming to her dark hair. There was a dirty apron over it.

Her arms were bare, beautiful, creamy arms, and hands with long, artistic fingers.

Her present husband stood leaning against the piano. He was a white-faced, blue-eyed, red-haired man, with no shirt or collar—he kept buttoning his greasy black coat up to his chin. He had a hollow cough that rumbled and rattled like an empty cart ; his staring eyes and long face seemed always surprised.

We fell into talk. She spoke slowly, in a soft, musical voice, good English, but with a little foreign intonation that carried the sentences up where we should let them drop.

We were all strangers in a little squalid room, of different nationalities, in different circumstances, but—it seemed quite naturally without difficulty, without that hesitating searching after words with which one generally tries to convey a deep thought—we began to speak of ourselves, of our ideals, of art, of love, marriage, eternity, God—as though we had for years been intimate friends. And they were our true thoughts, we were drawing aside the veil in our inmost sanctuary—as perhaps one could never draw it for those with whom one lived. My face was wet with excitement, so was the man's—

a sort of electric current leaped out from brain to brain, and we anticipated each other's thought before it was uttered. Words had never flowed so fast before. I forgot to see the faded wall-paper, the broken chairs, the threadbare carpet.

"We must speak English when we talk of religion," said Madame Pottiraud's soft, slow voice. "My mother-in-law" (indicating the charwoman) "is so bigoted!"

Artists are a race apart ; there was some strange link between me and that cosmopolitan woman with her twenty husbands, and the shirtless man with his high forehead and hollow cough over there by the piano. It was as though each of our spirits had inquired of the other—"How far advanced are you on the road to liberty?"

"You are a seeker," her husband said to me, "but I have found." A thought seemed to shine through his pale skin, he thrust his head forward. "Yes—this room is disgusting, I know it. That table is littered with cups left since yesterday and a filthy newspaper. My mother is a rough, sour old woman ; we are often hungry. But do you think we are unhappy ? No !"

In my excitement I forgot what I had come for. Instead of studying Madame Pottiraud I was studying her husband.

When one has glanced at a red dahlia, taken in its velvet heaviness, there is no desire to explore it further ; one has seen its colour—it has no scent.

But the man's white, suffering face !

I understood that Madame Pottiraud would be

always blooming ; it was her husbands and other people who died in the situations she created around herself.

" You must come again," they said.

" I will come," I told them, and took my leave.

XXXVII

LIFE

Houses, each building cut up into square compartments, and in each compartment—the drama of life and death.

Long French windows are open here ; they look out on to an old square court ; it is quiet, no one walks on the blackened cobble-stones, but from beyond the houses there rolls the noise of traffic, like the sound of a great sea for ever at high tide.

There is a string across that window and a row of brown socks and stockings hanging out to dry ; one can see right into these rooms. A baby laughs and bangs on the ledge with its fists ; a little girl—who is having her black hair combed by some rough, rude hand—cries out and is slapped ; there is a pell-mell scrimmage of children kicking on the floor.

A youth looks from the attic high up—he has been shaving for the last ten minutes and now feels his smooth chin thoughtfully. A red-faced woman in a black shawl is vigorously shaking dusters. Shadows are climbing up the walls, but a yellow beam of light still strikes into the room opposite, glorifying its brown walls. A table stands in the window with a red-and-white striped cloth ;

there is a picture, half hidden, and a crucifix hanging over the bed ; under the cross is a pale face turned sideways on a crumpled pillow.

All the afternoon it has lain like that, while the golden light creeps higher and higher and shadows chase from below ; while the clocks of this quarter chime the hours, and the black smoke floats away from the chimneys, and the grumbling, roaring life of the boulevard shakes the floors under our feet.

A woman in a blue blouse sits by the bed, watching ; sometimes she gets up softly and wipes that pale, moist brow—or she mixes medicine and raises the sick one's head.

Dark hair, brushed back, lies disordered on the pillow, a wasted hand clutches the thin folds of her nightgown. The flowers of a sick room are there, too—a pot of blue hyacinths beside the bed. Mingled with the noise of distant traffic, old-clothes and paper men shouting, comes her cough, that tears its way from her hollow chest and leaves her groaning.

The little girl with black hair has had a red riband tied round it ; she is going to the “gingerbread fair” to-night ; her mother has taken clothes from the cupboard and her old skirt hangs on the door now.

Up in the attic there is a bird-cage, and a linnet sings as though to gain freedom it would sing away its heart. The youth has brushed his hair and lit a cigarette, he is looking at himself in a glass on the wall ; he is going to the fair as well, perhaps, and some one special with him.

Grey twilight has swallowed up all the houses and nested dark and thick in each window ; over the smoke-blackened roofs the sky has deepened to the colour of wild violets.

A lamp is lit in the sick room opposite, one little patch of light in all that great grey building—it streams on the red eiderdown and on the white sheets, on the brass bed-knobs, on the table, and on the seat of a chair near the window. The nurse has raised the sick woman on her pillow and wiped her face and smoothed her hair. A fresh flannel is laid on her chest, a clean handkerchief is put in her hand . . .

High up, in another room, a figure passes in front of the window ; it is a musician, who takes down his violin from the wall and moves about with it restlessly. Now one sees his hand, pale in the shadow, tremble, holding the instrument, his cheek rests on it so lovingly and his black hair falls on one shoulder. He tunes the strings up to their sweetest, highest ; a note trills out and dies upon the still air. He is touching softly all the chords of life—to see which one vibrates this evening ; chromatic scales fleeing over the gamut of existence, bright and quick like the laughter of the children dipping their bread in the soup below.

Suddenly he changes his time—he has walked back to the window and looked out ; now it is the violin that sings itself—the mystery of twilight and hidden passion . . .

A man comes into the sick room opposite and stands silent by the bed, with his hands clasped and his shadow, gigantic, behind him on the wall.

The woman turns her face to his ; they gaze deeply, and for a long time at each other in silence.

Perhaps it is the vibrations of their two hearts that have stolen out into the twilight and animated the pale musician. He has found the chord of love, the rapture of the trees striving into leaf ; he is singing the sweetness in the wild flower sky, trilling like a nightingale beside a stream of water.

Life, pulsing, breathing life . . . The music quickens, he sweeps his bow across the strings—and one soaring note that has pierced the veil over the grape blue sky and brought down to us the evening star.

A clatter of hoofs on the cobble-stones far away. . . . Silence in that lamp-lit room, where the nurse has once more wiped the damp brow and the man has clenched his hands. Does he long to give of his own life, a few years, a heart-beat, a breath, a pulse, to the woman who is slipping away from him, who he watches with such silent agony ?

Does he long to take a little life from the general store in all this great palpitating city ?

Just a little—for her only ?

Love and honour we may buy and sell, but life—never.

The violin sings to itself, some divine secret, so sad and tender that each note dies while one hangs upon it. The music is broken by a fit of coughing that seizes the sick woman ; they raise her, support her, hold up her hanging head. Each gasping breath seems drawn from the whole length of her body ; she sinks back with a groan that makes the tall man shudder—it has all the malady of disease

in it, weariness, despair. He leans over her, he has clasped the bed-clothes, his shadow on the wall trembles . . .

There are voices singing in the streets, and always the eternal coming and going, the commotion of life. . . . But the musician is silent. In the room opposite they have pulled down the blinds.

XXXVIII

MOMENTS

LONELY

THERE was no sunset this evening, only a heavy, murky light that killed the last gold leaves ; the woods are dark ; an autumn cry wails through them . . .

. . . I am a lonely heart, always asking, asking, asking. I am so large that I ache with my largeness ; round me, empty, teems the full world driving me to madness. Only mists of sad, white-faced things come to live in me—they are heavy, like weight of crushed rain in November cloud. They are cold, tenacious, very passionate in a chill, damp way, swearing they will never leave me ; when I grasp them to ask are they real, they writhe with unutterable anguish and fade.

I am empty. Any cave echoing the sea all day is not so empty ; it would have some wild grey bird screaming across its opening.

“Want” is the darkness within me, crying all day, all night, for ever ; a cry that travels the throat and dies on the lips. Mute want, sore in its energy, mad in its impotence, blind in its rage. Tearing me, bruising me—want of a thousand things, and the primal want—as a flower would want, withheld from blossoming.

Sometimes a fellow heart stops to speak and the clamour stills ; warmth, joy—I look to this heart like a rising sun ; my mists turn rosy with borrowed light, I think I can never be dark again. Then my fellow heart walks with me, friendly, questioning asks :

“Who are you ?” And the depth of me cries : “I am lonely.”

Have you heard the wind travel across empty fields when the day dies, to rattle some skeleton leaf on naked tree—like old Death playing the castanets ?

I hear this wind, it betokens an empty landscape.

And the sun goes down, the mists sadden, grey again ; and the wind steals on one, very chill and spiteful. Tapping against one to mock the echo—“Lonely !” . . . Who would walk with Lonely ?

Night, so still, full of a thousand soft, indistinguishable things, is there room for me in you ? Mayn’t I stare eye to eye with your stars——

The stars are caught up ; they seem so far away and cold, it hurts to look at them ; Night laughs, hear her in the rustling branches ! And flying, a cloud shadow chased by the moonlight, evades me.

Cold, borrowed moonlight that makes all faces grey, what use are you to me ? I am lonely, lonely.

. . . There is sleep, that crowning sea rocking so gently ; babies, lovers, thieves, all pillow'd on her.

“Give up to me,” is the burden ; they give up and smile.

A wave touches their eyelids ; then, filled with their life, sleep sends them her subterfuge—dreams.

There is only this old emptiness here. You know me well enough, rocking for hours on your waves ; they hurry away, so wide and swift, and I rock and moan. How can I sleep ? I am lonely ! . . .

AWAKENING

A WORLD folded in mist, not a leaf stirring.

Strange lights creep through a sky of vapour, a far, white sun shows for a moment ; at ten o'clock the trees have hardened. There is a web of dew on the grass, the cattle stand knee-deep, neither lowing nor feeding.

A break in the mist, and now thrushes sing ; the morning begins to travel again ; there's a faint, far drift of blue ; and the web on the grass turns golden.

The sun breaks out of the clouds ; and now it's the streams that fly along the hillsides, like shining serpents gliding away into the shadows. And a gleam at sea, a far bright line—

A flood of pale sunlight flashing over the sky.

Daffodils ! Thousands of them, tossing and pulling, in the grass, under the trees, dancing and fluttering. A gale springs up, ripping the orchard, trampling the flowers like broken waves.

Spring winds ! There's a heifer lowing most painfully and the lambs are crying ; the great beeches shake like flowers and the rooks have gone mad !

At twelve o'clock the sky is blue, clear as water over the hedge ; lying on one's back gazing up through the twigs it is like summer.

A clump of silver ash, naked of bud ; a long bramble that has been swaying dizzily for an hour ; and in the sun foxglove leaves and ferns uncurling, celandine and violet.

There's a sound like the sea, as if the combe were full of water that flowed and thundered. This little violet shakes even in the shadow of the fern. A sound like distant waggons rolling.

But the sun shines warm on one's face.

Is earth ever lazy in springtime ? Longing to be let smile and rest ? And then comes this tugging of the silver ash, this driving of the wind over the face of all its dreams. A feeling of ancient weight and girth makes heavy the limbs ; there's a faint, warm pulsing, but whether in one's arms spread wide or in the grass—who knows ?

One has no power but to lie there searching the sky. Perhaps when the violet opens the plant has this full feeling ; selfless, because itself has stolen out on those blue wings.

MYSTERY

SOME of these November days are sullen as sullen ; one has to go out at night to learn the secret of them. Grey grass, no stars, nothing visible in the dim sky but moonlight—faintly touching the quiet trees.

Pine woods are dark at night ; one has a feeling of walking in sleep ! Nightmare, a sort of horror. It will not do to startle the trees ; at any moment their blackness may overwhelm one.

To creep to the foot of the ridge is like walking

at the bottom of a black sea flooding that hill where
the pines are tall and bare.

Still this grey sky with an unholy light about it,
faintly tremulous ; has some one carried off the
moon, are those her flutterings ?

A dark bird flaps heavily across the hill.

Something is stealing out from these dark trees,
just as it is stealing from the hidden moon.

Passion and Mystery—the lovers—are creeping
to a stolen meeting.

Mystery, that has been so wild and flying in the
moonlight ; now half-conquered, curious, shy,
furtive.

And trembling Passion.

When the dark bird flew and hid—it was Passion
calling out to the moon to hide her face.

And now, holding his breath, having pursued like
a dog on the trail, Passion crouches, waiting.

It is very still.

This tall mast of a tree quivers from root to tip,
another sways suddenly and trembles to its roots.

In a sort of drunken ecstasy the trees have all
gone mad, the sky swells and bursts with one pale
ray—

And there goes Mystery, pouring over the edge
of the wood ; a grey flood into a black cup—

And Passion headlong after.

SPRING

EARLY morning ; that gleam of dew on grass,
silver on the daffodil leaves ; joy, blue sky. These
south wind mornings ! The sound of the sea fills

my bones with laziness, the song of the sea :
“ Sleep ! sleep ! ” But I go on wandering.

Lane, field, bare brown hedge, cloud in the sky, cloud reflected in the pool at one’s feet—and then a lark springs up.

“ Ah ! This is the moment,” I think.

Higher and higher, higher and higher ! The blue must answer ! But the bird is silent suddenly and drops like an arrow ; my heart drops, too. No answer.

These south wind mornings ! All the shining, silver palm rocking to some tune ; white gulls wheeling round the plough ; two men eating their lunch, stolid, silent ; the horses feeding, and in the next field lambs.

Such little naked bodies, such queer legs, such innocent faces, putting out their little pink tongues at my fingers ; sniffing the breeze, questioning me, examining the scent of turnips, the lark’s song, and the wind-driven straw ; questioning their old mothers, the spring sky, and the feeling of the day.

“ Ah ! ” I think, “ I shall find it in the lambs——” And I stay a long while leaning over the hurdles, laughing with them. See this old lady call her own, looking round with yellow eyes ; and see how they run, and fall on their knees beneath her where she stands like an incarnation of the tranquillity of fields, and butt her with their little black noses, and wag their tails in an ecstasy of life. And how they lie down beside her !

And all the afternoon, and all the evening, when the sun went down primrose colour and the west was one wide sheet of honey dew, and a sigh escaped

from the earth and fell in mist on my face and on the grass—I went on questioning.

And when the evening star came out, and the west faded, and the moonless sky turned blacker than an unhappy dream . . . When that evening bird piped, and I was still driven to walk and walk until for sheer weariness my body gave up and I could only stagger sideways . . . and my eyes searched the black sky where vapour stopped the shining of the stars—I went on questioning.

And the void drew me on till my heart cracked, and something tender as love itself escaped . . .

If I had been a lilac tree a big green bud would have burst at that moment ; if a bird—I would have soared !

Spring !

WIND IN THE TREES

THE trees are talking ! South-west wind, full rolling sky, heavy, low-breasted over the Downs.

A murmur like a far sea, a great concourse of sound ; and over the country travel swift gleams of light, and over the tree-tops are revealed pools of divine spring blue. There are days early in the year when the fields throb with life, when they leap with each gleam of the sun ; there is the moment in autumn—when life starts flowing away.

From every tree and hill that blue soul streams out.

A wood of beeches on the hillside, these at the edge tipped with russet ; below them, dark against their silver trunks, a dell of thick green ash and elderberry,

with dwarf oak and holly. The wind has gone to the bottom of that dell to-day ; one yellow leaf has dropped down into the middle of their summer dream. And a wood pigeon flew out ; its call sounds plaintive. What is it asking ? Has it lost its mate ?

One of the beech trees has turned a most passionate gold. But now the sheep are calling, and far away the cattle.

These breaks of blue in the clouds would quench the thirst of a God ! It is the sky of Italian painters, the blue of an eternal youth and life . . . then why unrest in the trees ?

They have heard the wind. It is a song of death in life they are singing ; the green ashes have shuddered.

It is the song of eternal change. It carries a meaning from the purple woods to the flying thistledown, from the strong sap in the trees to their shaking leaves ; from the hills to the valleys, from the clouds to the earth, from our passionate hearts to our souls. It is the wildest, most glorious call ; the hills and fields start flowing at its first shout, and beech trees shine with the naked gleam of spring.

A music that is sweet and heavy in one ; as death is heavy, and life is sweet.

The song of *Eternal Change* !

AUTHOR'S NOTE.

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